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Not a "Gadget"— Nor a "Knick-Knack"—

But a valuable, proved device which has been sold successfully by business men as well as seasoned veterans.

Make no mistake—this is no novelty—no flimsy creation which the inventor hopes to put on the market. You probably have seen nothing like it yet—perhaps never dreamed of the existence of such a device—yet it has already been used by corporations of outstanding prominence—by dealers of great corporations—by their branches—by doctors, newspaper publishers—schools—hospitals, etc., etc., and by thousands of small business men. You don't have to service a man that he should use an electric bolt to fight his office instead of a gas lamp. No, you have to sell the new business man the idea that some day he may need something like this invention. The need is already there—the money is usually being spent right at that very moment—and the clarity of seeing the greatest part of this expense is obvious immediately.

Some of the Savings You Can Show

You walk into an office and find down below your prospect a letter from a sales organization, showing that they did work in their own office (or \$11 which is more) could have been done over \$200. A building type corporation pays our men \$70, whereas the bill could have been for \$1,600. An automobile dealer pays our representative \$15, whereas the expense could have been over \$1,000. A department store has expense of \$66.66, possible cost if done outside the business being well over \$2,000. And so on. We could not possibly list all cases here. These are just a few of the many actual cases which we place in your hands to work with. Practically every line of business and every aspect of the country is represented by these field reports which business men handle, covering money-saving opportunities which hardly any business man can fail to understand.

Profits Typical of the Young, Growing Industry

Going into this business is not like selling something offered in every grocery, drug or department store. For instance, when you take a \$7.50 order, \$5.85 can be your share. On \$1,500 worth of business, your share can be \$1,167.00. The very least you get as your part of every dollar's worth of business you do is 67¢—on no dollar's worth \$6.70, on a hundred dollar's worth \$67.00—in other words two thirds of every order you get is yours. Not only on the first order—but on repeat orders—and you have the opportunity of earning six even larger percentages.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Now you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, have the installation—whatever age the customer wants he will accept—at our risk, let the customer sell himself, after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer—it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invitation without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as an offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer. When called for yet to get even a hearing, our men are making sales running into the hundreds. They have received the attention of the largest firms in the country, and sold to the smallest businesses by the thousands.

EARNINGS

One man in California earned over \$1,600 per month for three months—close to \$3,000 in 90 days' time. Another writes from Delaware—"Since I have been operating (just a little less than a month of actual selling) and not the full day at that, because I have been getting organized and had to spend at least half the day in the office; counting what I have sold outright and on trial, I have made just a little in excess of one thousand dollars profit for one month." A man working small city in N. Y. State made \$10,805 in 9 months. Texas man nets over \$300 in less than a week's time. Space does not permit mentioning here more than these few random cases. However, they are sufficient to indicate that the worthwhile future in this business is coupled with immediate earnings for the right kind of man. One man with us has already made over a thousand sales on which his earnings ran from \$5 to \$60 per sale and more. A great deal of this business was repeat business. Yet he had never done anything like this before coming with us. That is the kind of opportunity this business offers. The fact that this business has attracted to it such business men as former bankers, executives of businesses—men who demand only the highest type of opportunity and incentive—gives a fairly good picture of the kind of business this is. Our door is open, however, to the young man looking for the right field in which to make his start and develop his future.

No Money Need Be Risked

In trying this business out, you can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. If you are looking for a business that is not overworked—a business that is just coming into its own—on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade—a business that offers the buyer relief from a burden, but no avoidable expense—a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can get foot—regardless of size—that is a money but does not have any price entry to connect with as other businesses do—that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business—that you are an owner individual who may one day be in a work and sometimes in a month's time—if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, get in touch with us at once for the rights in your territory—don't delay—because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime—and if it turns out that you were the better man—we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, get in touch with us—best send it right away—or wait if you wish. But do it now, dear friend.

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MARVEL

15c
NOVEMBER 1940

STORIES

**FICTION THAT
'THRILLS!'
THIS MONTH.**

★ ★ ★ UNUSUAL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL ★ ★ ★

Page 8

QUEEN OF VENUS

by John Russell Fearn

The radio-vibration towers that surrounded this madman's Utopia must quickly smash their plucky stratoplane, the disintegrator transforming their lovely golden-haired Eveta into a mass of electrons and energy must long since have seen her Queen of Venus, but Hilt Raad and Cranby Doyle still vowed never to witness a world robot-ruled, still vowed vengeance on this super-scientist who'd reduce all mankind to matter!

★ ★ ★ 3 NOVELETS THAT MAKE YOU THINK ★ ★ ★

Page 56

A DICTATOR FOR ALL TIME

by Raymond Z. Gallun

Here, then, was the final, the eternal Being—here was The Entity, the culmination of all scientific progress, with an inconceivably vast and complicated body comprising every element and compound that could exist, with a brain weighing well over a thousand tons!

Page 78

THE MAN WHO

by A. Fedor and Henry Hasse

Had Dar Mihelson's Time Traveller Indeed crashed the barriers to the past? Would Dar Mihelson, the man, indeed be able to shake hands with Dar Mihelson, the boy?

Page 90

SUBSTITUTE FOR WAR

by D. D. Sharp

Orillium, Cyrus Schultz named his radio-active principle that would completely wipe out all insects and disease, and the world called him the savior of humanity . . . Only Cyrus Schultz knew that actually he had doomed mankind to an inexorable and eternal hell!

★ ★ ★ SHORT STORIES THAT THRILL ★ ★ ★

Page 67

THE THOUGHT-WORLD MONSTERS

by D. D. Sharp

Do our thought-images actually exist in the thought-world? —Speed Howell didn't think so, and besides, he wasn't interested in science!

Page 106

CYCLE

by John L. Chapman

If momentary exposure to the cosmic rays beyond the Heavenside Layer made a super-man of an ordinary mortal—what fabulous titan of strength and intelligence might the human become who'd spend many hours under such forces!

★ ★ ★ MARVEL'S SPECIAL FEATURE ★ ★ ★

Page 102

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

by Ray Cummings

What part will science play when the United States is invaded? . . . Can science create nothingness? . . . Why will motorists of the future prefer night driving?—MARVEL'S Sensational New Super-Science Department!

- THE COVERby J. W. Scott
- INSIDE STORY ILLUSTRATIONS.....by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby

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FOR THE
FIRST TIME!

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THE 7 KEYS TO POWER TEACHES YOU ALL THE MYSTERIES OF LIFE from the cradle to the grave—and beyond. It tells you the particular day and hour to do anything you desire, whether it be to the light of the moon, sun, or in total darkness, in accordance with Ancient Teachings. We make no claims ourselves, but the author, Lewis de Claremont, says: "The power to get what you want revealed at last, for the first time since the dawn of creation. The very same power which the ancient Chaldeans, Cuthic Priests, Egyptians, Babylonians and Sumerians used is at our disposal today." He says: "Follow the simple directions and you can do anything you desire. No one can tell how these master forces are used without knowing about this book, but WITH IT YOU CAN MOLD ANYONE TO YOUR WILL."

"From this book," he claims, "you can learn the arts of an old science as practiced by the priestly orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this book. It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them, or were to be blinded by past failures. Don't confuse this book with any other book having a similar name. There is no other book like this one, although many people have tried to imitate it." He says, "It is every man's birthright to have these things of life: MONEY! GOOD HEALTH! HAPPINESS! If you lack any of these three great necessities of life, then this book has an important message for you. No matter what you need, there exists a spiritual power which is abundantly able to bring you whatever things you need. In it you can find the way to all power, the way to GET ANYTHING YOU WANT."

"The SEVEN KEYS TO POWER contains the secret of all real success and REVEALS THINGS YOU NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE." Its great author LEWIS DE CLAREMONT has a rare gift which comes only to a few, showing things as they should be in their true light. NEVER FAILS TO BRING RESULTS."

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| Unite people for marriage | Banish evil spirits |
| Obtain property | Bring happiness to broken lives |
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| Make any person love you, no matter who | Gain the mastery of all things |
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"A. O., Moon.
"Actual pupils' names on request.
Pictures by professional models.

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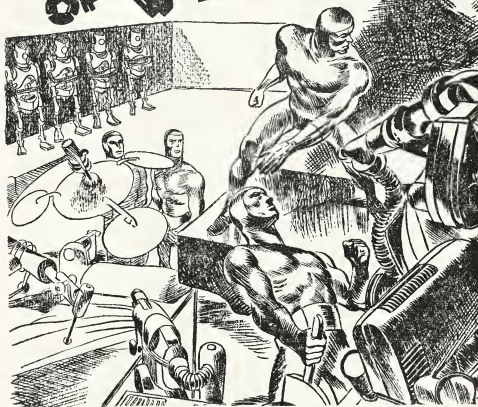
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FEARN

QUEEN OF VENUS



Weird mechanisms stirred the projectile, suddenly sent it trembling through

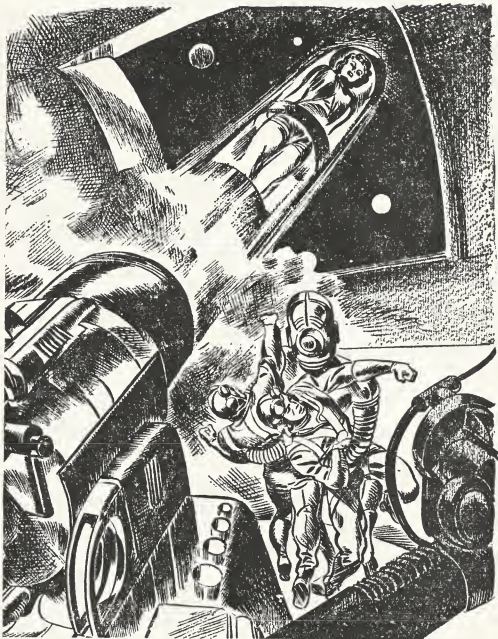
*Machines must reduce all mankind to matter, a disintegrator must
and energy, for Hilt Read and Cranby Doyle knew their plucky
encircling this mad*

TO Hilton Read the ceaseless droning of the stratoplane's engines had become a part of his life; engines that had never once fal-

tered in their sweet surging rhythm since he and Cranby Doyle had left New York three days before.

Three days without touching ground,

STARTLING BOOK-LENGTH SUPER-SCIENCE NOVEL OF THE DICTATOR OF TO-



the aperture. "You've done it!" Hilt cried. "You've shot her to Venus!"

*transform their lovely golden-haired Eveta into a mass of electrons
stratoplane could only fall to pieces before the radio-vibrations
scientist's Utopia!*

on the fastest non-stop world-hop in history. New York to Madrid, across Italy, Soviet Russia and Mongolia, and now . . . The Pacific Ocean again

with only about two thousand miles between them and home.

Hilton sat hunched over his controls like Rodin's immortal statue of the

MORROW, OF A WORLD ROBOT-RULED, OF MAN REDUCED TO MATTER!

Thinker, save that both his hands were on the control gears. His massive leather-jacketed shoulders overflowed the narrow, strongly sprung leather seat; a pillar of a neck poked from the jacket top and supported a head of tumbled blond hair. A side view revealed his face as one of strongly chiseled masculinity—full, firm lips, a straight nose, gray eyes. Yes, he was almost handsome, this young Hercules who had so far whisked every aeronautical trophy out of his beloved United States.

His companion seated before the radio and the charts in the neighboring seat was cast in a different mould. He was less in stature, wiry and strong, sat folded up like a wire spring about to uncoil. His features were thin to the point of being haggard, etched out in a cynical smile that typified his constant attitude towards life—one of dry tolerance and good humor. There was precious little that could ruffle Cranby Doyle; he'd seen life in too many spheres, usually high above the earth, for that . . .

"Can you imagine how they'll start to yammer when we land back?" Hilt asked suddenly, grinning. "I can just picture 'em! Police squads, girls, the mayor, banquets— Hell, but I'd sooner hit the hay and let things drift. Eh?"

Cranby's only response was a shrug. He was busy on calculations.

"At the moment we're about fifty miles from Hawaii," he commented. "That should bring us home in about—twelve hours . . ."

HE paused, switched on the radio as it buzzed noisily on the emergency circuit. The mechanical voice of East American Weather announcer came forth.

"Calling all Pacific Ocean sea and aircraft in Quadrants Seven and Nine! Hurricane expected in these areas, bearing south eastwards. Be on your guard.

Seek shelter. That is all."

"Hurricane, eh?" Hilton wrinkled his nose and stared over the seascape. Far away in the distance he glimpsed the Hawaiian Islands: directly ahead low down on the horizon was a faint smudge that denoted the westernmost Americas.

"Next time I think we'll equip this damned thing with floats," Cranby murmured, his cold blue eyes directed through the window. "If we had them on now we could find shelter, because unless I'm nuts *that* is the hurricane right behind us!"

Hilt twisted round and stared through the rear window. Far to the back of them the blue sky had paled to misty grayness; with the seconds it crept into visibly deepening dark. Tendrils of angry nimbus spread across the sky like frost over a window pane.

"Say, this is serious!" Hilt's jaws clamped together suddenly. He swung back again and slammed in the controls, fought suddenly for altitude.

"We skip right round the damned world with hardly a shower and now we're nearly home we get this!" he growled savagely.

"I told you to avoid the hurricane belt," Cranby sighed. "Of course I'm only your friend and side kicker and so—"

"Dry up, will you? How near is it?" Hilt swung his head round, a frown on his features. The sunshine had gone. The peaceful calm of the seascape had changed to somber hues. Above the noise of the plane's engines came a slowly rising crescendo of sound. Little buffetings of wind banged round the small flyer's fuselage and streamlining.

"Charming! Positively charming!" Cranby observed.

Hilt twirled back again, his face carved in strain. He stared at the cloud-ridden remoter heights for which he was aiming, gave the engines every vestige

of their power, shot with bulletlike velocity into the upper reaches with a force that pressed him and Cranby flat in their seats.

But the ship didn't quite make it. Suddenly, with all its incredible fury, the hurricane arrived. The whispering puffs and tuggings of its approach resolved suddenly into a cataclysmic nightmare of impacts. The whole atmosphere was screaming, a howling tempest whipping creamy rollers along the sea below. Rain slashed against the plane's windows with unbridled ferocity.

Plunging and leaping helplessly the flyer twisted and turned in its frantic efforts to rise. It was beaten down, refused to respond to Hilt's frenzied coaxings. Cranby sat with a frozen, fatalistic smile on his face, clutching the radio instruments for support. He flashed a glance outside as a piece of bodywork tore off with a noise like rending calico.

"No use!" Hilt panted at last. "If we try and fight this we'll be down in two shakes. Only course is to fly with it."

"And to hell with one perfectly sound world record," Cranby groaned. "Why did I ever become a stratoman?"

HILT swung the machine round with difficulty, eased the tail into the very teeth of the hurricane. Instantly the whole vessel was caught bodily in the tempest's grip, screamed across the ocean like a leaf in a fall gale. Keeping position as well as possible as the control room rocked and swung crazily, Hilt held the machine's nose straight ahead. His eyes began to fill with bitter regret as he realized how far they were swinging off their appointed course.

"Just where are we heading?" he shouted, after ten minutes of roaring wind and rain.

Cranby hunched himself over the compass in its universal mountings, kept his body passably steady. Five minutes

more slipped by before he answered.

"As near as I can figure it out the hurricane has veered southeast, just as the weather bureau forecasted. We're still over the Pacific, some two hundred miles east of Christmas Island, and no sign of Santa Claus."

"Quit clowning!" Hilton roared. "What direction are we taking?"

"Southeast, of course. What the hell else did you expect?"

"Anyway, the darned thing may blow itself out after we've crossed the Equator line," Hilt grunted. "In that case—" He stopped, startled eyes on the fuel gage. "Sweet Hades!" he whistled.

Cranby looked too and sucked his teeth. The gage was down to quarter-full.

"Must have used up the juice in fighting the wind for altitude," he said briefly. "Of all the cockeyed ideas! Unless the wind drops we shan't have enough fuel to get back to New York anyway!"

Hilton fell silent, staring at the sweeping rain on the window. The vision of failure so near to home was too stunning to contemplate . . .

It was many hours before the hurricane abated. By gradual degrees it subsided and at last evaporated into nothing. Hilt began to relax a little, breathed a long whistle of relief as the sun streamed forth in all its tropic glory. He peered at the sprawling country below, glanced anxiously at the still further lowered fuel gage.

Cranby looked up from the instruments, nodded his head below. "That's the northwest corner of South America. Probably Ecuador. Right now we're heading across Peru to the east. That means four thousand miles to New York and three thousand to Rio de Janeiro. We haven't enough fuel to make New York anyway."

"You're telling me!" Hilton scowled in thought. "O.K., we'll turn due north

back to Puerto Rico. One of our own fueling stations is there."

He threw in the rudder-fin control and waited impatiently for the flyer to swing round—but it didn't! It flew on in a straight line as before. Hilt gave a start, repeated the action with more ferocity, but still nothing happened. Cranby angled his face against the glass and squinted at the rudder. It told its own story—sundered wires were hanging down forlornly.

"We can't turn," he stated finally. "Unpleasant though it is, we've got to go in a straight line, or else come down and fix the damage."

"Down there!" Hilt looked ominously at the alternately rock and verdure ridden terrain.

"Hardly to be recommended," Cranby admitted ruefully. "If we keep on going in a straight line we might make either Pernambuco or Rio. I always said they should build stratoplanes so as you can get outside and make running repairs. Wonder why my ideas don't appeal to people?"

HILT sat biting his lip; finally he shrugged. "We might just make it," he muttered. "Try anyway: depends on the fuel. Better send out a radio call in case we get into difficulties."

"In case!" Cranby echoed blankly, then sat down at the apparatus. "Hilton Read World Hop plane calling!" he intoned repeatedly into the mike, until at length the accented tongue of the Pernambuco radio station responded.

"Call received, Hilton Read. Go ahead."

"Carried some two thousand miles off our course by hurricane. Flying now over North West Brazil, approximately 650 longitude and zero latitude. Will call again. Heading for Rio or Pernambuco. Please relay."

"O.K. We'll keep in touch. Weather ahead is good. Hope you make it."

"You and us both, sweetheart . . ." Cranby switched off and lighted a cigarette. "Pity we failed. I'd cleared the sideboard for the trophy."

Hilton wagged the useless rudder control furiously. Finally he gave it up and concentrated on the compensating controls, held the plane as near to a straight course as possible by the compass.

Far below the terrain changed slowly as they moved with bullet swiftness over the pure virgin greenness of the Brazilian interior. The main worry to Hilton was the strong head wind into which they drove. His face grew gradually grimmer as the passing time the fuel indicator level sank lower and lower . . .

In two hours, with only half the distance covered, it had sunk to zero. Motionless, he and Cranby sat staring at it, then they looked at each other, and finally the world of green below.

"This head wind!" Hilt raved. "We're sunk, Cran, good and proper—"

He broke off as the giant engines gave an ominous splutter. For the first time since the start they coughed over the dwindling fuel, banged and backfired furiously. Desperately, Hilton eased in the last drops.

"Calling Pernambuco!" Cranby shouted, slamming on the radio transmitter. "Hilton calling! We're falling! Send help! Longitude 47, latitude 15—"

He twirled round as the engines went dead, sat motionless in his seat. Like two images he and Hilton stared down at the sea of green rushing up swiftly to meet them. The wind souged through the streamlining as they dropped with increasing swiftness. Hilt maneuvered frantically, as well as he could without a rudder. He dipped and tilted to ease the fall, his whole being concentrated on the task.

But Cranby saw something else dur-

ing those wild plungings, something in the distance perhaps five miles away. It glittered with silvery brightness in the dying light of the sun. Like a mirror—

Then he held his breath as gargantuan trees swept up to meet the ship.

There was a monstrous splintering and rending, a stunning concussion that hurled him out of his seat. Hilton shouted hoarsely as tree branches smashed through the window, as he belted backwards against the wall with an impact that knocked the senses out of him. Darkness closed on his racked body . . .

CHAPTER II

HILTON became subconsciously aware of scorching liquid coursing down his throat, of a surge of vitality back to consciousness. Dazedly he opened his eyes, moved suddenly, then winced at a wrenching pain in his shoulder.

It took him a second or two to piece things together—Then he remembered. Cranby was bending over him in the light of a small, newly kindled fire. The heavy darkness of jungle was in all directions, punctuated by animal calls and the crackling of sappy branches in the flames.

"You're O.K.," Cranby observed laconically, putting the brandy flask back in his pocket. "Gash on the shoulder; no bones broken. I think I was unconscious for a few seconds. Got a crack on the head. Dragged you out of the plane. We'd no gas left to catch fire anyway . . . But say"—he glanced around quickly—"I've been hearing things. Else it's the result of that fall. Pin your ears back and listen . . ."

Hilton lay listening intently to strange, heavy thuds emerging from the jungle, followed by a crackling of twigs

that was certainly not the work of animals.

"I get it!" he exclaimed abruptly, getting to his feet and steadying himself. "It's the noise of knives hacking branches. Savages, maybe."

"Yeah?" Cranby's hand dropped to his revolver. He yanked it from its holster and stood grimly at the ready as the sounds came nearer. Quietly Hilt followed his example.

But it was not a horde of savages who finally entered the clearing, but almost naked white men—or so they appeared to be at first. As they came nearer into the firelight's range it became evident that their skin was golden yellow, their hair ravenly dark. In a way they were handsome, and from their expressions they were obviously puzzled. Their dark eyes flashed from Hilt to Cranby in startled interest.

"O.K., boys, take it easy," Hilt said tersely, glancing at the strange weapons in the men's hands. "I don't know whether you cotton onto my language or not, but you'll understand this!" He twirled his gun menacingly.

"Wonder which circus they've escaped from—?" Cranby began, mystified; then his sentence broke off short as yet another figure entered the clearing. He was neither half naked nor yellow.

He moved languidly, attired in soiled white ducks, a topee at an almost rakish angle on his head and a half consumed cheroot in the corner of his mouth. In build he was rotund; the round face that showed under the helmet was flabby and double-chinned. The eyes seemed to be very bright blue.

"Really, gentlemen, violence is not called for," he remarked, in a smooth mellow voice, strolling forward with his hands thrust in his jacket pockets. "In fact, if you get violent you will be bound to get the worst of it. Right now I have you covered, and my men are equipped

with lethal weapons which you cannot possibly fight."

"I'm not dropping my gun for you or anybody else," Hilt growled back. "I don't know who you are or—"

"Forgive me. Glyn Underwood is the name . . . And I *should* drop those guns before I signal my men to blow off your revolver hands. That might be—er—shall we say painful?"

Underwood lazily withdrew his hands from his pockets. A small automatic was in each of them. He watched steadily over the faint wisp of smoke from his cheroot.

Hilton shrugged, dropped his gun into the soft loam. Slowly Cranby did likewise. At a signal one of the men came forward and picked the weapons up.

"O.K., wise guy, what next?" Hilt snapped.

UNDERWOOD smiled round his cheroot. "You will be my guests. I rather fancy we have one or two things to discuss. We have only five miles to cover, a mere nothing in the radio-bus. Come—and in front of me if you please."

The two fell into step in front of him, walked slowly behind the yellow men as they followed the trail they had already forced through the jungle.

"Say, what the heck's a radio-bus?" Cranby murmured.

"Don't ask me! But nothing this guy can do can surprise me. I don't begin to get the hang of it at all."

In five more minutes the radio-bus mystery was almost solved. Standing in the center of a clearing was an egg-shaped machine with a forward propeller and helicopter screws. Definitely it was unorthodox, resembled a theoretical space machine or stratoplane of the far future. Hilton was studying its odd lines as Underwood came up.

"Rather an advance on the clumsy

flying machine, is it not?" he asked politely. "It works by radio from my city. Remote control is something you know about; this is purely an extension of the idea. Radio waves provide both the power and the guiding path. It can of course use ordinary fuel if necessary—"

"But there's no city in this waste, surely?" Hilton broke in.

"On the contrary . . ." Underwood waved his right hand automatic to the airlock. "Enter, if you please . . ."

He swung round to the yellow men, snapped out some orders in an unknown language. They turned and moved off into the jungle.

"They can walk," he explained, smiling as he entered the lighted control room. "I always think walking is an occupation best suited to the lower minds, don't you? It wastes so much time, a habit beloved by the animal . . . You're sure you are comfortable?"

He looked at the two in their sprung seats: they glared back at him. Not that he seemed to mind. Now they could see him in the light they were not overimpressed. The eyes *were* bright blue, very shrewd and hard over the cheroot, and there was more than a hint of subtle cruelty behind that suave, mechanically smiling visage.

Slowly he sat down before the controls, seated sideways so he could anticipate any move against him. Quickly he flicked in switches and the queer vessel rose with effortless ease into the air. At a height of two hundred feet the climb stopped and another set of switches moved. The ship shot forward with tremendous velocity, traveled as though rushing down a chute.

"All done by radio, for which neither guidance nor braking is necessary," Underwood murmured, aiming round a bright blue eye. "We shall automatically come to a stop when we arrive in the city."

"Just who are you?" Hilt demanded, leaning forward. "What on earth are you doing in this neck of the woods?"

"I am a god," Underwood stated calmly.

"That's what you think," Cranby commented dryly. "You may be a god to those yellow guys, but you're dealing now with two hundred percent Americans. Just what *is* your racket?"

"Forgive me, but it is my job to ask questions, not answer them . . . Not that I need to ask many. I know your names, I know you are world hop fliers who ran out of fuel. Your radio messages from your plane told me that. I saw you land and decided to come for you."

"Generous of you. Why did you put yourself out?"

UNDERWOOD smiled. It was a strange smile, insolent and evasive. He blew a cloud of smoke in the air and said nothing. Hilt clenched his fists and went slightly redder in the face; Cranby leaned back with a frozen grin. That rocklike automatic held the pair of them in their seats. In those few seconds Hilt's half-formed suspicions of this well-mannered mystery man changed to deep hatred. His fingers itched to get at that flabby, fleshy throat.

Then his attention was distracted by the view through the window. He gazed down in amazement on a bowl of light spots dancing in the dark. They became larger with the minutes until he could clearly distinguish the outline of silvery buildings needling up to the skies. And towards them the radio-bus was sweeping with a gradually diminishing velocity.

"Say, this place must be what I glimpsed when the plane fell," Cranby muttered. "I saw something gleaming— Funny nobody has ever seen it before."

"The dead," Underwood said calmly,

"tell nothing. No flyer, no explorer that has ever seen this city has told it to the outer world — and none ever will!" He shrugged. "I must apologize for sounding unpleasant," he added, "but just consider for yourselves. What South American explorer or aeronaut has ever mentioned this city? None! True, there have been legends about buried cities, but after all— Well, those who have crossed South America and seen my city were brought down. As for others, they will see nothing and tell nothing."

Neither Hilt nor Cranby passed any remark to that. A great glittery square of floodlit rooftop was sweeping out of the dark to meet them. Without so much as a jolt the ship came to a halt. Underwood put his guns away and opened the door, waved outside.

"An attack on me will not avail you anything now," he smiled. "My people will protect me, avenge me to the death, because I am their god. You understand?"

"Be damned if I do!" Hilton grunted.

He strode outside onto the rooftop with Cranby beside him. Silent with amazement they gazed over the strange city. From this height they could discern the orderly street, the delicately chiseled buildings, the tall towers for purposes unknown. There were windows in plenty and in some of them were lights. Hilt's brooding gaze traveled over the whole enigma to a distant roseate flush perhaps a mile away. Over the top of a low roofed building he fancied he caught a glimpse of drifting rainbow hues like sunlight on a waterfall spray. He raised a puzzled eyebrow.

"The Eternal One," Underwood explained unhurriedly. "A geyser which my people worship because they believe it gave them me. It erupts at thirty minute intervals, ceaselessly."

"And you were the best it could vom-

it?" Cranby asked briefly.

"Two priests of the golden race always guard it," Underwood went on, his cold eyes staring right through Cranby with the malignancy of a snake. "There are times when to satisfy the people the Eternal One needs a sacrifice . . . Medieval of course, but there it is."

"Who in God's name built a city like this in the middle of the jungle?" Hilt asked at last.

"Who built it is no concern of yours. I call it Utopia . . . Yes, Utopia, because it brings the realization of my fondest dreams. I am an idealist, my friend . . ." Underwood stood regarding the expanse for a moment, then swung round. "But I am forgetting I am your host. Come with me."

TURNING, he led the way down a flight of steps to the building's lower reaches. In baffled silence the two followed him. The journey took them—whether purposely or unavoidably they did not know—through vast halls flooded with white light in which reposed machines of every imaginable description. But every one of them appeared to be idle, heavily caked in protective grease, had the appearance of never having been used.

Three such halls they traversed in their journey to ground level, and in every case beheld machines of titanic meaning and inexplicable power. They could not even start to guess at the purpose for which they were intended, and certainly Underwood did not volunteer any information.

SO FINALLY they came to the street itself, had the buildings towering on all sides of them in silvery loftiness. Here and there they glimpsed golden men, and occasionally women, watching them furtively—only to dodge back hastily when Underwood caught sight of them.

"Guess they don't like you much, Underwood," Hilt observed dryly.

"Not every subject reveres the master," he said ambiguously. "I have found it quite impossible to achieve my ideals without causing a certain amount of hardship to the people . . . But they will recover. A human being, particularly an unintelligent one, is a most adaptive animal."

"They struck me as being fairly brainy," Cranby said, as they started to march down the street. "By no means savages, anyway."

"Savages compared to me," Underwood averred, and gave his insolent smile.

Hilt frowned worriedly, wishing he could fathom this egoist lost to the world and apparently to all scruples as well. He became silent, busy with his thoughts, observed subconsciously that they finally left the street and entered a building apart from the others. It was flooded with the customary bright light. He was still silent as they presently came into a room as big as a ballroom, the walls draped with rich tapestries, the furniture all metal and comprising numberless chairs, a table, and a desk. Thick curtains of heavy material, the like of which was unknown in the outer world, hung over the massive windows.

"My own particular study and dining room," Underwood explained, his keen eyes glancing at the table. It was set for three. In the further reaches of the room two golden-hued women, shapely and not far short of beautiful, waited in respectful silence.

"Fortunate for my servants that they laid the meal without fault," Underwood smiled, throwing off his hat to reveal dark hair turning gray. "I am never tolerant towards a fault; there is no room for mistakes . . ." He crushed out his cigar in the ash tray with certain inexorable meaning. "But please sit down. You are my guests."

"Prisoners!" Hilt corrected, dropping into the appointed chair with Cranby opposite to him.

UNDERWOOD shrugged, poured out a pale wine into three glasses. With that the meal started. It was sumptuous enough and was followed by heavy, luscious fruit. At the end of it all Hilt at least felt a little less irritated, but still mystified. He looked grimly across at Underwood as he thoughtfully lighted a fresh cheroot.

"Don't you think it's time you let your hair down, Underwood?" he asked bluntly. "The servants have gone; we can talk freely. Just what are you driving at? What are you doing here? What do you want with us?"

"Would you really like to know?" Underwood murmured, and at the grim looks of assent he clapped his hands sharply. The words he spoke were foreign, but in response one of the women brought him in a hand microphone with flex trailing to quarters unknown.

"Listen carefully," he invited, holding it before him. He depressed the switch and waited a moment. Clearing his throat he spoke round the cheroot.

"My people, hear me! Stop your work in factory, home and mine. Your God is speaking . . . For a long time now you have groaned under the weight of oppression, believing—and rightly—that only a sacrifice to the Eternal One could ease the yoke about your necks. In that you have imagined correctly. I have only carried out the orders of the Eternal One, and if those orders have been harsh towards you it was not my fault. But now there is to be change, my people . . . The Eternal One shall have a sacrifice at dawn tomorrow . . . Not one sacrifice—but two! It is many years since such a sacrifice was made, but the fates have brought us two from the great unknown, two who will willingly give their lives to the Eternal One

that oppression may be forever removed from you. At dawn tomorrow the Eternal One shall be appeased . . ."

Underwood paused; then repeated the whole thing again in a foreign language. Finally he closed the switch and laid the microphone down.

"Some understand English," he murmured. "Because you understand it as well I gave it in that language first. The other message was in the people's own language."

"Just what the heck *was* all that bunk?" Hilt snapped.

"It was I confess a trifle pagan in its appeal—but that is the only way I know of in which to exact interest from these strange people. I can control them to a certain point with my western knowledge and culture, and by the use of some of the machines in this city, radio forces for instance. But to achieve my own ideals I am forced to inflict hardship. The yellow people resent it, believe that the Eternal One—the geyser—inflicts it on them through me. Strange indeed are the notions of the primitive, uneducated mind. But there are some among these people who are not so dense as their fellows, and they might start an uprising against me unless— Unless I appease them for a long time to come with a sacrifice, a double sacrifice, to the Eternal One."

"In other words it's a polite way of telling us we'll be chucked in that waterspout tomorrow morning?" Cranby said bitterly.

"At least it has been nice knowing you," Underwood sighed. "When you are both dead and the sacrifice made I shall temporarily ease the working conditions of the city under a supposed command from the Eternal One. Then I shall creep back to the old regime. You see, I have to gain time until my work is finished, and to gain time I'll sacrifice anything, throw away human lives if need be to stave off possible

revolution and failure."

"Just what is your work?" Hilt insisted. "At least tell us that!"

"I have nothing to tell you, or anybody." Underwood smiled urbanely, blew smoke in the air. "All I can suggest is that you prepare yourselves for the dawn. It will soon be over, I assure you. You will fall, bound, into the boiling mud river which runs at the base of the geyser shaft. Perhaps you will be somewhat burned, but death will bring swift release. I really am sorry, but you see I am compelled . . ."

HILTON sprang to his feet. "By God, Underwood, if you think—"

"I'm afraid I do!" Underwood drew out his automatic suggestively.

"You realize that planes from Pernambuco are coming to look for us?" Hilt went on desperately. "You can't get away with it, man! You're up against fliers who will find you this time, and your damned city. They'll blow hell out of you . . ."

"Really? I am afraid that if one plane or a thousand come to look for you the result will be the same. I have said that no man ever seeing this city can tell of it to the outer world. It wouldn't do. I loathe sightseers . . . You see, radio waves can be altered in length to become vibratory. That means that any material structure, such as a plane, just falls apart. Inconvenient for the pilot, of course, but— Well, if one has power as I have it may as well be used to advantage. There are quite a few radio-vibration towers in this city."

"You didn't build 'em anyway!" Hilt blazed. "You don't have the brains to think out such masterpieces! Petty tyranny is your line! A little empire away from everybody where you can be dictator over a lot of unhappy innocents! Who really invented the machines and wonders of this Utopia?"

A cold, inscrutable smile was the only

answer. Hilton breathed hard, thumped his clenched fists on the table. The automatic still pointed at him— Then suddenly his mounting rage spilled over, regardless of the consequences he shot out his right fist with devastating force.

Never expecting the hazard Underwood did not get time to fire. He took those iron knuckles under his flabby jowl, went reeling backwards, chair entangled on top of him, his gun clattering to the floor. Cranby dived for it and Hilton followed up his advantage. Swinging the struggling man to his feet he slammed him again, sent him flying back across the open floor with a crimson nose. He teetered on his heels, rocked back to equilibrium and tore frantically at his other pocket.

"Better not, pal!" Cranby's voice was clipped and hard. "I'll wing you, Underwood, sure as hell. Fact I'll kill you, and glad of it."

"This—this won't get you anywhere!" Underwood panted, mopping his nose.

"Guess we've made a good start anyway," Hilt retorted. "Grab that mike and take back that promise of yours, or else—"

"Well, what do *you* want?" Underwood snapped suddenly, glancing irritably towards the door. It was an old gag, but it worked. Cranby glanced around in surprise, and simultaneously Underwood tore his other gun out and leveled it. "Drop it, Cranby!" he commanded bitterly.

Scowling with fury at himself Cranby obeyed. Underwood smiled, at his ease again, retrieved his fallen cheroot. Again he mopped his nose.

"You really have not improved things by this," he said at length. "I was going to grant you a comfortable night here; now I think an uncomfortable one in a dark cell is called for . . ." He broke off and called sharply. In a few moments two six-foot golden hued men

entered quietly, took the men's arms in a firm grip.

"March!" Underwood snapped. "And I'll be right behind you, so don't try anything. March—damn you!"

A MILE walk through the city ended for the two in a cell of total darkness, upon which there closed a massive door. They felt around for a seat or makeshift bed, but there was none. Finally they sat on the floor. Cranby saw Hilt's rugged, bronzed face for a moment as he struck a match to light a cigarette. Then there was only a red glow in the void.

"Swine!" Hilt breathed at last.

"A charming host," Cranby admitted. "Wonder if he'd come to my New Year party and give away presents to the kids?"

"Mad—obviously!"

"I'm not so sure of that, Hilt. He's got a whole lot of power in this city and some distinctly ingenious ways of getting the support of the people. If only I knew who the people are and what he means by an ideal I'd be a heap more satisfied . . . Give me a cigarette, will you?"

A match scraped. Cranby inhaled complacently.

"Not much good knowing anything when it's curtains tomorrow," Hilt growled presently.

"Unless the rescue plane—"

"Oh, why kid yourself, man? You know as well as I do that Underwood's got everything just where he wants it."

Cranby lay back against the wall, smoking thoughtfully, his eyes fixed on the red end of his cigarette. In spite of his anxiety of mind, never revealed through his habitual levity, physical weariness was a dominant factor. It seemed centuries since he had slept. He extinguished his weed, allowed his thoughts to trail off—

He opened his eyes again to daylight,

sat screwing his fists into his eyes and gazing at the opened door of the cell. Men were limned against the rosy flush in the east. Hilton was already standing up, set faced, his fists clenched helplessly.

Then Underwood appeared, hat one-sided on his head, the eternal cheroot angling out of his mouth.

"I trust you passed a comfortable night?" he smiled. "No? Well, never mind, you have such a long sleep coming to you I am sure it will make up for it."

He snapped his fingers sharply at which four of the golden men came forward with strong cord in their hands. Hilt stood in grim silence as his arms were bound to his sides, as every part of his body was fastened immovably. Cranby struggled for a moment, realized the futility of it, and finished up the same way as Hilt.

Underwood examined the ropes minutely, paused a moment—then drawing back his right fist he landed it deliberately in Hilt's face. Helpless, he fell backwards, was jerked upright again by one of the golden men. He shook his head dazedly, felt a trickle of blood from his nose.

"My apologies," Underwood murmured. "That cancels our debt for last night. Thanks to you I have the jaw ache this morning . . . All right, take them out!"

"If I ever get my hands on you, Underwood, I'll—"

What Hilton intended saying was abruptly truncated. He was lifted into the air by feet and shoulders, carried horizontally on the shoulders of four of the men. Twisting his head he saw Cranby being treated likewise, desperately though he was trying to free himself.

Underwood came up in the rear, marching with calm, unhurried tread.

Hilt slanted his head around, as he

was carried, noted the files of golden-hued men and women lining the entire route from prison to geyser. At the geyser itself there were hundreds of them, packed in serried ranks upon all sides of a vast, specially constructed amphitheater.

SET on his feet at last Hilt stood staring about him, struck by the pagan idolatry of the place. It was something from the classics, the amphitheater, with the geyser spouting its vicious steam column in the center. For quarter of a mile round it were cracks and crevices, an exact circle being maintained by a metal ring which joined the floor of the amphitheater. Around this ring, marching with ceaseless tread along a narrow pathway, were four men, weirdly attired, pausing ever and again to bow to the steam-jet which at the moment was quiescent.

"They're nuts all right," Cranby observed grimly, as he too was lowered.

Hilt said nothing. His eyes searched the dispersing morning mists above.

"If you are looking for a plane, my friend, it came during the night," Underwood volunteered, smiling cynically. "It even came towards the city—but that was all it did! It dropped in pieces at approximately three-ten this morning. Curiosity killed other things besides cats, you know."

"You devil!" Hilt whispered, staring at him. "You inhuman devil!"

"I think," Underwood remarked, "that it is sunrise!"

He stood staring towards the east, stomach protruding, dirty white coat drawn taut in the small of his back. Finally he nodded as the first shaft of rising sun smote the spurting steam of the geyser. It was the signal for the packed masses of people to burst into a roar of sound. They became eager, restless.

Underwood turned and marched for-

ward, took up his position on a small raised platform close to the geyser. He raised a commanding hand for silence.

"Last night I told you that the Eternal One should have sacrifices," he cried. "Today I fulfil that promise. For this the yoke of bondage will be removed from you."

There were solitary cheers from those who understood English. When the words were given in the native language the applause was deafening.

Hilton and Cranby looked around desperately; then they were seized in a relentless grip, carried along the narrow pathway to Underwood's side. They stood rocking on their feet, trying to maintain their balance on the very edge of the crater, from the center of which spouted the geyser from its lava-formed cone.

"Look well!" Underwood invited.

The two did not need the injunction. Their senses reeled at the vision of that sheer varicolored chasm going down into steamy darkness. The whole thing was obviously an extinct volcanic crater with this newly formed geyser cone in its center.

"Down at the bottom is boiling mud, lava, and white hot ash," Underwood stated with implacable calm. He stood eyeing the two, grinned at the sight of their set, sweating faces. Then he shrugged. "Such a pity we could not prolong the friendship," he commented—and suddenly thrusting both his hands forward he shoved sharply.

Hilt and Cranby reeled helplessly to the pathway edge, overbalanced, and dropped headlong into the depths. At the identical moment the geyser spouted with sudden magnificence, formed Underwood's gross figure against shining, scalding mist. He raised a hand.

"It is done!" he thundered, then stood in grim satisfaction as a tide of praise and loyal acclamations rolled towards him.

CHAPTER III

AS he toppled over between those varicolored walls Hilton cramped his eyes shut, set his teeth for the agonizing shock of striking that molten fury an unimaginable depth below. Anguished seconds sliced off as he dropped through space in total darkness—then suddenly he struck something soft and yielding, rolled helplessly sideways over and over, finished up in darkness amidst a pile of cold—gloriously cold—stones!

A second later Cranby landed on top of him. They lay together, panting and sweating, staring at a dim gray circle in front of them through which they had obviously just tumbled.

No mud? No death? No—? Hilt blinked, absorbing the colossal fact that he was alive and unhurt. A torrent of thoughts poured through his brain. Then Cranby's voice broke in on them.

"Turn on your side; I'll get my teeth on your ropes."

So the struggle began. Cranby finished up with bleeding gums, but Hilt was free. Before long they were both standing side by side, moved with mute accord to the opening through which they had rolled.

"A net!" Hilt whistled, his face baffled in the daylight sifting down the shaft.

Cranby stared at it in wonder. Incredible though it seemed there *was* a net of enormously strong and resilient silken cord stretched taut across the shaft to unseen staples on the other side, the whole being totally invisible from above. The tilt downwards immediately explained to the two why they had pitched sideways to safety. Further below, perhaps another two hundred feet, was the faintly glowing inferno into which Underwood had planned they should have fallen.

Hilt glanced up. The top of the shaft was a round circle far away.

"Can it be that we—we were deliberately saved?" Cranby asked slowly.

"Looks that way, but who—?" Hilt scratched his head, then shrugged.

"Well, we can't get up this shaft even if we wanted to, which I don't think we do. Only thing is to carry on through this cave and see where it brings us. Let's go."

He yanked out his matchbox and used the tinders with infinite economy. It was pretty evident that their cave had only one exit, leading into a black tunnel with a curious gray glow at the end of it. Puzzled, they hurried along it, stopped at the mouth of the passage and stared in awed wonder upon a volcanic hell. For a distance of two miles in front of them yawned a vast hole in the earth like a monstrous pan filled with molten lead. Crushing, beating waves of heat swirled around them as they stood looking, their eyes took in the vision of that relentless, unthinkable hot sea surging below.

Hilt passed an arm over his streaming face and stared round the edge of the crater. There was a fairly wide ledge ringing it, and on the left was the black hole of another cave mouth.

"Might risk it," Cranby said, glancing at it.

"O.K.—and if this is a dormant volcano I'm a monkey wrench. Looks right on the verge of eruption to me. Listen to it . . ."

Cranby nodded grimly as monstrously deep buried concussions floated up to them. Against the black, glistening walls little pieces crumbled away and dropped to feed the angry maw beneath.

"Come on!" Hilt snapped suddenly.

HE eased himself gently along the ledge, pressed flat against the frowning wall, dared not look into the

white-hot sea below. Sweat poured down him in rivers as he went along inch by inch to that cave mouth, Cranby close behind him. The pair of them looked like flies on the edge of a pan of boiling milk. Inch by inch, both of them measuring the chances of the least slip: inch by inch through blistering inferno—until at last, a seeming eternity afterwards, Hilt reeled into the cave mouth and dragged Cranby in after him. They stood breathing hard, regaining their shattered nerve.

"There'd better be a way out," Cranby panted; "I'm not going back through that for all the money in Washington . . ."

Again they went on, passing a right-angled passage before which they hesitated; finally they ignored it and went straight on instead. To their surprise it brought them to a three-foot square of immensely thick glass—incredibly thick indeed. Possibly a foot through. Silent, amazed, they gazed through onto a cavern lit with pale yellow light. It was easily the most incredible thing they'd struck yet in this weird city.

The cavern was stacked to the walls with complicated instruments, every one of them functioning to some unknown purpose. The purpose indeed seemed to be centered on four motionless, hideous beings lying prostrate on four tables in the center of the machinery. What light there was revealed the creatures as insectile. Their heads were antlike and equipped with antennae. Legs were numerous, the two forelegs crossed on chitinous breasts as though in death. Perfectly motionless the four lay, the machinery working steadily about them.

"Well, whadda you know?" Hilt whistled at last. "What in heck are they, anyway?"

"I'd say ants with hypertrophy."

Hilt scratched his blonde hair. "More I see of this place the more stumped

I get. Pretty obvious we can't get in to them, anyway. Only way now is to take that right-angled passage . . ."

He turned back actively. Together they followed the passage to its end. But it finished in a narrow chasm in which surged boiling cataracts of water, roaring with Niagara force. Hilt stopped nonplussed, stared through the clouds of steam towards the opposite side. He blinked for a moment as he fancied he caught a glimpse of somebody watching him from a cave mouth level with their own.

"Guess I'm going nuts," he growled. "Looks to me as though this flood is something new. In which case—" He broke off, staring again. There *was* something on the opposite cliff face across the river—a group of people. He smiled grimly. So their escape had been discovered, eh? He turned away bitterly, debating how to find some other way out of the mess; then a voice hailed from across the chasm.

"Hey there! Are you the sacrifices?"

Only for a moment did Hilt hesitate, then yelled back an answer.

"Yeah! What are you waiting for? If you're trying to recapture us you're unlucky!"

"We're friends! Revolutionaries! Are you willing to risk a rope across?"

Hilt cocked an eye on Cranby, who nodded.

"Might as well. No way out anyway."

"O.K., sling it over!" Hilt shouted.

THERE followed signs of movement on the opposite side of the chasms as an apparatus was brought into view. Then something shot like a harpoon across the divide bearing a rope with it, much in the fashion of a life line. Hilt caught the rope end, secured it round a massive shoulder of rock.

"Well, see you in heaven," he remarked briefly, then swung out hand

over hand across the surging river. He prayed to Providence he would not get cramp; that Niagara of boiling water was itching to seized him. Again he was scorched and seared, felt his hand, getting stiff and numbed until he could hold out no longer. It was at that moment that other hands gripped his arms and legs and dragged him upward to safety. In five minutes Cranby was across beside him.

They stood looking round in some amazement. There was a party of five golden men and one girl in the tunnel. The girl in particular held attention. She was medium-seized, dark as a Polynesian, with regular well-shaped features and a smooth, lightly clad body. Rather to Hilt's surprise she had none of the dumb languor common to the other women he had seen. Her voice, though soft, was practical enough in what it uttered.

"We're revolutionaries," she said quickly. "That is we oppose the rule of the god, better known as Glyn Underwood . . . I'm Eveta," she finished, with a modest little smile.

Hilt grinned. "I'm Hilton Read; this is my pal Cranby Doyle . . . Say, was it you that fixed that net over the geyser shaft?"

The girl nodded. "We wanted to save you. From the radio broadcast by Underwood last night we knew the exact time and everything—but only we know of the tunnels under the ground leading to that half-way spot in the geyser shaft. We fixed the net to save you and had intended being there to meet you when you fell, only—" She looked down into the chasm anxiously. "This sudden underground eruption stopped us. This chasm is usually bone dry, like the crater pit further along."

"That isn't dry either," Hilt said grimly. "It's filled with boiling lava. We nearly fried getting past it."

Eveta glanced significantly at her

companions. "I don't like it," she went on slowly, her firm young face setting. Then, "We knew you would have to come this way to get through; you couldn't get past the cul-de-sac of the Wanderers."

"The beetles in the clock store?" Cranby asked casually, and she gave a faint smile at his simile.

"Yes. I'll explain that later. At the moment you had better come with us. We saved you in the hope you might be able to help us overthrow Underwood. Some of us are engaged on that job between times. Our hide out is down here . . . Come with me."

Hilt thrilled to the grasp of her warm encouraging hand as she led the way into the darkness of the tunnel . . .

THE DISTANCE the girl covered was only short, and it ended in yet another cave of enormous proportions, lighted by naturally ignited volcanic gas. In some surprise Hilt stood looking round on the men and women lying or sitting on the rocks; then his gaze traveled beyond them to a hazy mass of machinery at the far end of the cavern.

"Here," Eveta said quietly, "is the full complement of revolutionaries, men and women who have dedicated their lives to the overthrowing of Underwood and the restoration of the peaceful days we once had . . ." She looked somberly in front of her for a moment.

"Then Underwood doesn't know anything about your being down here?" Hilt asked.

"No. He knows nothing of these underground caves and passages. We know them from life-long association with them. Down here in these catacombs we can plan in peace, and since it is not our shift at the factories we're safe enough."

THE girl turned and motioned to a nearby rock, seated herself upon it

with Hilt and Cranby on either side of it. The others stood looking on, maintaining silence.

"Perhaps I can explain it to you briefly," the girl said. "You two are the first men outside Underwood to ever come to this city, and therefore we have the hope that you might be able to aid us by understanding some of the things Underwood uses against us. You might for instance know of a way to defeat his strange powers of radio destruction. We knew nothing of radio, you see."

"We *might* do something . . ." Hilt mused a moment, glanced grimly at Cranby. He was loathe to admit he didn't know the first thing about radio disruption. He went on quickly, "About this Eternal One business? Do you believe in it?"

"None of us here do," Eveta answered. "The geyser is volcanic, of course, and has its birth down here—but because the Wanderers are also buried down here, and because many of our race are just like superstitious children, there has grown up around the geyser a legend to the effect that since it comes from below it carries the orders of the Wanderers with it. That legend is now a tradition, a religion, of which Underwood has taken fullest advantage."

Hilt stroked his stubby chin pensively. "Yeah, so I've noticed. Then who are the Wanderers? What are they doing lying out cold?"

"They have lain that way for untold ages. So long that none of us can remember when they began. They are sealed in that cave and it can only be opened from the inside, by *them!*" Eveta paused, considering. Then she asked quickly, "Are you scientists?"

"Sort of," Hilt said. "Why, what's the angle?"

"Well, it may sound unbelievable to you, but we people—all we golden ones—are Venusians, reared from Venusian

life-culture by the Wanderers an inguessable time ago. Earthly conditions molded these cultures into earthly appearance. Had we evolved on Venus we would have looked like the Wanderers—insectile . . ."

"Yeah?" Hilt stared his amazement. The girl's seriousness was enough to convince him.

"So we grew here in this impregnable city of Valordom—or Utopia, as Underwood has called it. Buried in jungle the city was pretty safe from prying eyes, though I daresay legends have grown up about it. . . . Anyway, there was mating and intermating; we flourished. But we were like children in a wilderness of machines. We found every machine locked up. We could not—and still cannot—understand or use them. Only the Wanderers understand them and they have been asleep so very, very long. Records say that they left Venus because of a plague and came and settled here, reared life cultures, then sealed themselves below for the purpose of exploring the cosmos by mind-projection, a task in which they were interrupted when the plague came. Don't ask me what mind-projection is: the Wanderers alone can explain that if and when they ever awake. Now you see why legends have grown around them."

"But we all believe they will awake someday, and when they do the mystery of the giant machines will be explained, and the reason for the indestructible city of Valordom unearthed."

"Then you people are sort of caretakers of this place?"

"WE were until Underwood came!" The girl's face set bitterly. "He soon mastered us, particularly the more pagan of us. The rest of us went under, but with the firm resolve to one day emerge victorious. Underwood reached the city from the jungle; he was delirious and half dead. We got him back

to health. In response he turned on us. He was, it seemed, the only survivor of a private expedition searching for the lost lands of the Incas, whatever those may be."

"And then?" Hilt persisted.

"Now he has only one object in view. This city is made of *valsix* metal, which is actually crude iron ore treated with electrical processes to finally make it untarnishable, acid and explosive proof. Underwood made an analysis of it and ever since has been trying to find the right formula to duplicate it. Such a metal, once the full formula is known—for of course the Wanderers have locked it up somewhere—could gain vast power for Underwood in his outer world. That much we've found out. Also, he is mastering by degrees the intricacies of radio-vibration destruction, with which he can invent weapons of offense. . . . So he has two good reasons for staying in Valordom, and he keeps us hard at it experimenting on ores, making different tests, until he satisfies himself that he has found a formula that the outer world can duplicate. He has, I believe, one friend in the outer world, somewhere in the America from which he himself came originally. To this friend he radioes at intervals on a special ultra-short band which only his friend can receive. This friend will tell him when success has finally been reached in outer-world duplication of *valsix* and radio-control."

"Do you know this friend's name?" Hilt asked slowly.

Eveta shook her dark head. "No. Underwood always calls him by number and no names go back and forth. I have heard the radio messages often while I have worked my shift in the radio power rooms. I simply do as I'm told and keep my ears open. I suppose Underwood imagines it doesn't matter if any of us hear what he says, and he can't operate the vast transmitters alone. . .

I know so little about radio," she went on, clenching her little fists. "We have used it for years by simply following out the instructions left to us by the Wanderers. By its aid we have learned many outer world languages besides our own. . . . But to follow out the orders of pressing certain switches and starting up certain generators does not explain the actual processes involved. If we knew that we could very probably defeat Underwood in no time. . . ."

"Sorry, Eve, but I don't think so," Hilt said grimly. "Underwood is turning radio to many startling uses, uses which even I could not hope to understand without years of research. Either he is an expert scientist, or else he knew enough of radio to transform it unimaginably from its basic system. A madman, I guess, with notions of world power like they all get. . . . And he might just do it at that unless— Just what sort of a counter-scheme did you have in mind, anyway?"

For a long time the girl sat in moody silence, then she said slowly, "There is perhaps just *one* way to get at Underwood. These catacombs have many shafts leading up to the surface, one of them going up directly under the floor of Underwood's main study-dining room. Now we think that if we could—"

SHE broke off suddenly and glanced up as one of the men came dashing forward from the cave mouth. His face was drawn in sudden alarm.

"The river in the chasm! It's rising!" he gulped hoarsely. "It means—"

Eveta jumped to her feet. There was an instant stir among the gathered people. Hilt glanced up perplexedly.

"You were saying about—"

"No time for that now," the girl interrupted him anxiously. "Don't you understand? An internal water eruption! I thought it might end in that when I saw the river in the chasm, when you

told me the volcano pit was afire again. They happen every few years these things, and each one seems to threaten to be the last. If the Wanderers would only awake they could probably master the difficulty . . ." She broke off and glanced round. "We've got to get out of here quick and finish planning later. Come on!"

Hilt shot Cranby a helpless glance, listened for a moment to the ominous concussions booming from the cave entrance; then as puffs of steam started blowing through it, pushed before a hot, scorching wind, he followed the flying golden figures across the cave, caught up with Eveta in a few seconds.

"This way!" she panted, and darted into a side tunnel in which the volcanic gaslights were bobbing fitfully at the stir in inner pressures. The rest of the dispersing people vanished miraculously.

"They'll find their own way!" Eveta exclaimed. "We've got to look after ourselves. Hurry! Hurry!"

She went down the passage like the wind with Cranby and Hilt blundering after her. Behind them the booming had increased to thunderous roars as pent-up forces released themselves. The girl stopped suddenly, then made a surprising leap upwards and caught the bottom of a rope ladder swinging in space. With the agility of a trained acrobat she swung herself up to it.

"Up!" she screamed, mounting rung by rung. "Up! Before the water gets here!"

Hilt understood then, followed her example, leaned his strong arm down to Cranby. Thunderous commotion roared and belched from the tunnel as Cranby muscled up to the first rung. Not a second later a solid wall of boiling, bubbling water pounded through the tunnel as though out of a giant sluice. Clouds of suffocating, acrid steam went surging up the shaft. From the midst of

it came the girl's shout.

"Keep climbing! Quickly!"

Swinging in the fog Hilt and Cranby ascended slowly for a distance of perhaps two hundred feet, emerged from the pouring steam belching around the shaft top to find themselves in the open with the girl waiting anxiously for their appearance.

In rim silence they stared about them. They had emerged at a fairly distant part of the city on high ground, not very far from the building on which the radio-bus had landed at the commencement of their adventure. Things were happening in the city in plenty. . .

From a dozen quarters steam was stabbing upwards in relentless power, sending monstrous obscuring clouds over the sun. The Eternal geyser itself was now occupying its entire crater, projecting a magnificent thousand foot plume into the skies. Water, surging cataracts of boiling water, was everywhere. From this high position the three could see the scurrying figures of men and women racing for the buildings. Not that those could afford lasting protection against water. It would be bound to penetrate eventually.

"Looks like we might open a laundry around here." Cranby said finally.

"This is just like the last time, only worse," Eveta muttered in a hollow voice. "There were only three extra geysers: this time there are a dozen."

"Just what do we do?" Hilt asked quickly. "Stop here on the chance that the flood subsides or try to get on top of one of the buildings? We are cut off from trying to reach the jungle anyway."

He looked round him as he spoke, then gave a violent start. His eyes narrowed as he caught sight of a figure in white on the flat roof of the building half a mile away on which the radio bus had landed.

"Underwood!" he exploded, pointing.

Cranby and the girl turned to look. "You're right!" Cranby breathed. "And I think I can figure what he's going to do. He's going to use his radio-bus to shoot him across the flood to the safety of the jungle. Nice work—"

"We've got to stop him!" Hilt shouted, clenching his fists. "Come on, before the water cuts us off!"

He leapt forward immediately, raced pell-mell down the slope separating him from the building. Two yards behind him pelted the girl and Cranby, running with lung-bursting speed to defeat the first sweeping tide of hot water encroaching now on this remoter part of the city . . . They only just made it, floundered up the steps of the building as the water raced past them in a scalding tide.

WITHOUT pause Hilt dashed for the stairs, raced up them like a demon, floor after floor, through the silent machine-halls. As he had hoped, Underwood had left the roof trapdoor open in his emergency, was in the very act of scrambling into the radio-bus as Hilt rushed onto the flat roof.

The impetus of his arrival gave him the advantage. Underwood had no time to draw his gun; he found himself seized in a clutch of iron, whirled from the ship's airlock, then hurled half across the roof by a terrific blow between the eyes. The utter amazement he was experiencing at finding the man he had thought dead here to attack him wiped the fight out of him for a moment. Then his eyes narrowed as he saw Eveta and Cranby appear. Malignantly he scowled at the girl.

"So this is some of your doing—" he breathed, scrambling to his feet; but a second later he was down again, his mouth salty with blood.

"Get in Cran—you too Eve," Hilt snapped, backing towards the airlock himself as they did so. Then he sud-

denly started forward again, his hand clamping down on Underwood's right wrist as he struggled to tear his gun out of his pocket.

"If you take it easy I'll get you clear of this mess, on my terms," Hilt panted. "I'll not let you die in the flood—but you'll play it my way and like it!"

"Like hell!" Underwood gasped back, and tore himself away, ripping at his pocket.

"O.K.!" Hilt roared. "Now you'll take back that blow in the face you gave me!"

He whipped round his right fist, struck Underwood in the jaw. The man lurched backwards dizzily, stumbled hard against the rail edging the roof. His head and shoulders leaned far out, then with a wild howl he over-balanced and vanished from sight.

Breathless, set-faced, Hilt hurled himself to the roof edge, watched in grim bitterness as the flaying body in white struck the swirling, boiling river surging past the building. It vanished instantly in the smother. He stood gazing down on the all triumphant waters, glanced at the screaming, whistling gey-sers spurting their scalding death to the skies.

Internal fury had gone mad under Valordom. In an hour the place would be inundated. Already there were numberless golden bodies, atrociously burned and bloated, floating in the rising waters.

"Hey! Come on, can't you? How'd you work this damned thing?"

He swung round at Cranby's urgent voice, headed for the bus's airlock, clambered within and spun the valve shut. Dropping before the controls he forced his mind to work to remember the actions Underwood had performed the night before. Push in the red button, shift the green . . . He tried it out gingerly, grinned with satisfaction as the helicopter screws suddenly went in-

to action and raised the little ship high over the roof.

"Underwood? He fell in the flood?" Eveta asked quietly, coiled up in the back seat.

"Yeah—overbalanced." Hilt's face set grimly. "He had it coming, I guess . . . Say, why the devil doesn't this thing go forward?" he snapped impatiently, pressing the appropriate button. "Engines are working O.K."

"The radio rooms will be flooded; generators out of action," Cranby said, thinking. "Try the ordinary propeller."

HILT studied the controls for a moment, scratched his head. The radio devices made little sense to him: the normal control board was far more understandable to his aeronautical knowledge. Carefully he eased in what he took to be the correct lever. Immediately the flyer stopped its climb and swept smoothly forward with ever-increasing speed.

"Got it!" he cried. "And boy, is she a beaut—" He broke off, looking at the fuel gauge. "Full!" he yelled. "What d'ya know!"

"I think I can explain it," Cranby said swiftly. "Underwood knew the radio power would be useless anyway, hence the ordinary gasoline fuel. He planned hopping back to civilization, probably to return when the flood has gone down. It would be no use him going just as far as the jungle, anyway, as we first thought. This flood may last weeks. . ."

"Quite that," Eveta confirmed, gazing down on the buildings rearing up amidst the scalding stream.

Hilt smiled rapturously. "Are we fools for luck!" he breathed, hurtling the ship forward from the obscuring clouds. "We're going right back home—to New York!"

"New York!" Eveta cried, her dark eyes gleaming. "The outer world!"

"Yep—and once there we'll make proper plans, come back to this place when the waters have gone down. If Underwood planned a bright future for *valsix*, so can we, and without his tyrannical methods. I don't see letting a fortune go to waste. The metal won't be hurt by the flood anyway. Besides, the machines interest me. I want to make a thorough scientific investigation. . ."

He grinned again, gave the machine all it had, tore out over the wastes of jungle and headed due north.

CHAPTER IV

THOUGH he did his best to make a quiet return to New York, Hilt failed miserably. For one thing he arrived by daylight the following day, and his strangely designed ship was immediately sighted, followed, and thereafter became studied by eager crowds until it finally landed at the New York airfield from which he had started his world-hop in his own plane little more than five days before.

Questions rained on him. Everybody knew of his forced landing in South America. Where had he gotten his strange new ship? Who was the dark girl in overlarge overalls who hid shyly behind his massive form?

Hilt mastered the situation as best he could, said the word hop had only been a blind anyway, that he had wanted to test out a new machine—the one he'd come back in. Sure he'd come down in South America, but the radio report had been garbled: he'd come down deliberately near his secret airplane laboratory, of which this particular flyer was an experimental product. Reporters gobbled up the news, television cameras reared up in all directions. The girl? Oh, yes—his wife. Been married to her

secretly for some time . . . That suited the romance-hunting specialists. Altogether, Hilt considered he scrambled out of the mess pretty well without giving away any secrets. Cranby was not so sure, though he said little.

Anyway, the public was satisfied. He had failed to make the record, but since he had a new type of plane he was still a public hero. Impatient though he was he had to run the gauntlet of eulogy. The mayor threw a banquet, notables spoke of valor and conquest of the skies, toasts were rained on the baffled Eveta who, plucked from the city of Valordom to this mighty metropolis of the west, was not quite sure whether she was on her head or her feet. She sought protection in Hilt's masterful control of the situation, timidly clung to him, listened while he explained to her that they were married now by special license. She smiled happily at that, glanced up at him with her big dark eyes. . .

It was a week before the three of them could successfully throw off the public demands on their time—then at last they were free to go their own way. Hilt promptly had the airplane moved to the hangar at his out-town residence where it took the place of his original stratoplane.

Eveta fitted with consummate ease into the household of his big, rambling place, never once gave away any clue as to her real origin. As the weeks went by her quick, keen mind adjusted itself to the new situation. With secret pride Hilt watched her slowly fit into the methods and style of New York. She became calmer, more dignified, a wife any man could be proud to have. . . . It was only when they were alone that she would confess her bewilderment and terror at some of the things the city pressed upon her. It was so vast—so complex, compared to the life she had led. Hilt only smiled, gave her gentle encouragement, to which Cranby added

his share whenever he was at the house—which he nearly always was.

BY degrees Hilt evolved plans, unhurried plans since he wanted to give the waters of Valordom plenty of time to subside. His main method was to contact as many big men in metallurgy as he could find, together with steel magnates and big business bosses, testing each one carefully to determine exactly how much one could expect from a metal like *valsix*. And the more he went into the matter the more Hilt became convinced of the vast fortune the metal could realize.

ONE metallurgist in particular was a constant caller during those weeks—a slim, black-headed man with light blue eyes and a very decisive manner. He was, it seemed, an experimental metallurgist with a private fortune, and as such was willing to go to any lengths to exploit the unnamed wonder metal at which Hilt had guardedly hinted. Of all the other men connected with the idea, this one in particular possessed the keenest interest.

Inwardly Hilt did not like him. He was too keen, too damnably precise in everything he said and did to please his blunt, matter-of-fact character. But he allowed no hint of this dislike to become apparent. Victor Lanning might be useful somewhere.

It was during the fourth discussion in Hilt's own laboratory, at which Cranby was also present, that Hilt could stand it no longer. He looked very directly at the immaculate metallurgist and said briefly,

"Just what *is* your interest in my proposed metal, Lanning? I haven't got it yet, you know: you treat the whole thing as though I had. To say the least of it, it's queer!"

Lanning lighted a cigarette. "Nearly as queer as your story to press and pub-

lic," he answered slowly.

"Meaning what exactly?" Hilt shot a quick glance at Cranby.

"Do you really imagine for one moment that I, of all people, swallowed your ridiculous narrative about a hidden laboratory in South America for airplane manufacture? Anything but it! I don't believe that any more than I believe your wife is a girl from America. Why not admit the truth? You found Valordom, you found *valsix* metal, and the girl belongs to Valordom. Now you'll try to market *valsix*."

Hilt compressed his lips. "I might have guessed it. You're Underwood's partner in crime?"

"I was his partner," Lanning snapped; "until you killed him! You did that in the hopes of getting the metal for yourself, but you'll not do it. I've kept in close touch with you recently and asked so many questions just to find out what you were driving at. You've ruined a perfect plan between Underwood and me, and I'll repay you in full for your damned meddling. I'm not just a metallurgist, my friend; I'm a scientist as well. And an infinitely better one than Underwood."

"Then why the hell didn't you go to Valordom instead of sticking here?" Cranby put in sharply.

"It suited me better here, that's all—"

"Listen, Lanning, you've got me wrong," Hilt broke in. "I didn't kill Underwood: he met his death in a geyser eruption . . . And come to think of it what makes you tell me all this now?"

"Why not? I'm just giving you fair warning to keep clear of Valordom and all it contains. If you do that you've nothing to fear. But if you persist I'll finish you, Hilton Read—and you, Doyle . . . Not to mention Mrs. Read."

Hilt clenched his fists, suddenly seized Lanning by the coat lapel.

"Now listen, Lanning . . . You're

not scaring me. If this is a declaration of war between us you'll find me good and ready. You'll follow out Underwood's tyrannical rule only over my dead body! And you'd better not try anything on my wife, because if you do I'll follow you to the ends of the earth, to the ends of the universe if need be, and smash every bone in your body one by one . . . So—think it over!"

"That goes for me too!" Cranby snapped out.

LANNING shrugged, pulled his coat back in place. Without a word he turned, picked up his hat, and left the laboratory. The door closed with a certain sinister quietness.

"Trouble," Cranby said slowly, "is blowing up in good big clouds. . . We've gotten ourselves a different sort of enemy in Lanning, Hilt. He's hard—hard as forged steel. No superficial geniality like Underwood had."

"Yeah—you're right." Hilt stared moodily at the door. "If this were Valordom instead of New York City we could settle him. As it is we'll have to sit tight and finish our plans, then return to Valordom and meet him on his own ground. At the moment he's as checkmated as we are. He has laws to contend with, and the Valordom floods won't have fully subsided yet, either . . . Whatever happens I must watch Eveta day and night, in case. But if Lanning tries anything like that—I!"

Hilt left his sentence unfinished, but the color deepened in his neck.

VICTOR LANNING did not drive to his apartment in the city after leaving Hilton. Instead he headed out of the city to a deserted factory site standing in isolated ruin in the midst of brick-clay workings. The long untenanted factories were a good blind anyway; and since he had bought the land ostensibly for building he was well within his

lawful rights. Only he knew that beneath the old factories there was a laboratory—a gigantic cellar, formerly a furnace room, stocked now with all manner of instruments, some orthodox and others the product of his own brilliant, incisive mind.

As usual he concealed his car in the nearest brick shed and closed the doors, entered the laboratory and switched on the lights. A faint, taut smile was around his lips as he thought of Hilt's words.

"Possibly a dangerous customer," he muttered, switching on the generators. "The brawny kind who sometimes succeed through very lack of fine planning. However . . ."

He stood listening critically as the generators rose to a whining scream, then he crossed to one of several control panels and closed a series of switches. In answer, a cagelike mass of wire twirled slowly on a slender rod, stopping finally as there burst from a loudspeaker a curious jargon of words.

Lanning sat down, began translating the words rapidly—and the more he translated the more his eyes began to gleam . . . That he could have netted a fortune from this startling radio invention alone never seemed to have occurred to him, or if it had he had pushed it on one side as unproductive. Fortune was one thing—but world domination by force of scientific knowledge was distinctly another, and it was the latter idea that always absorbed his pitiless, insatiable mind. Here in this laboratory he had always picked up the radio calls from Underwood. Underwood, by no means gifted with such genius as Lanning, had passed on such radio knowledge as he had found in Valordom—and Lanning had used it, to very startling effort!

Here he had radio pickup in its essence. The cage sent forth streaming waves of magnetism, magnetism which passed straight through the earth and

emerged at any predetermined spot without loss of power. Hence horizon curve was no hindrance . . . By a simple process of controlling the pick-up in exact sympathy with a flawlessly accurate map, there was no difficulty in directing the magnetism to any given spot. Once there it fulfilled its purpose and absorbed whatever sound waves were passing round it, transmitted them back along the electromagnetic beam to the source of origin. Transformers did the rest in much the same way as radio reproduces the original sound from electrical waves. No spot on earth was sealed to Lanning. Voices reached him from far and near, through the strongest walls, through all locked doors. He could have mastered the world through knowledge of the plans of nations there and then—but as yet he had other ideas.

At present, even as he had for a week past, he listened to the strange language floating to him from Valordom in the South American jungles. The language he understood fairly well: Underwood had long ago supplied him with its basic meanings. Venusian language, and the Wanderers were uttering it! The Wanderers had awakened . . .

Lanning wrote on steadily, a scientific eavesdropper, heard things that at last made him give himself up to meditation.

"So the floods have subsided?" he murmured at length. "That's good hearing—but the rest is better! Is it possible that control of not one, but *two* worlds is within my grasp? Space travel! They have unwittingly shown me how to accomplish that. I can make a space machine . . . And carbon! Diamonds! Infinitely better than *valsix*. Yet I might even use both. By Heaven, I just wonder . . ."

He glanced up at the loudspeaker and began scribbling again.

It was a week later when Hilton felt

he had all the necessary metal magnates contacted in readiness to go to work on *valsix* metal once he had obtained samples. He felt free to arrange for an immediate return to Valordom. Of Lanning he had heard nothing in the interval; if he had gone ahead to Valordom he could be met on his own ground, and that was the one thing Hilt wanted. Without conventions and laws to hamper him he felt sure of his ability to master the cold-blooded scientist completely.

"I take it we go in the radio-bus?" Cranby asked, as he, Hilt, and Eveta were grouped together in the library after dinner to discuss their final arrangements.

Hilt nodded, glanced at the girl. "You're pretty certain the floods will have gone down by now?" he asked her.

"If they run true to form, yes . . ." She frowned for a moment. "Hilt, I really can't quite understand what all this struggle for *valsix* metal is for. Why bother with it? You have money, loads of it, and we have peace and contentment. Why walk right into danger?"

Hilt smiled. "You don't understand this modern outer world very well do you, Eve?" he murmured. "It isn't so much the money that impresses me: it is the thought of what I can give to America. I can give a metal which can replace steel, which can be useful for munitions and armaments and invulnerable against attack. You see, dear, we live here in a world at war, war from the air, and that war could never come to the country that has *valsix*. That is what I am thinking of. Besides, there is the other angle. I want to know more about Valordom, the Wanderers, the giant machines—"

"Look!" Cranby shouted suddenly.

HILT glanced up from his meditative ramblings at that astounded voice.

He too felt a surge of horror pass through him as he gazed at Eveta. She had become curiously motionless and rigid; her face had gone deathly white. But that was not all. She was becoming *transparent*!

"Eve—!" Hilt screamed suddenly, jerking out of his paralyzed wonderment. He hurled himself at her, brought up sharp against the library desk against which she had been standing. His mind reeled to the awareness that the girl was no longer there! A surge of electric energy, or so it felt to be, made his hair roots tingle for a moment. Cramping trickles ran the length of his body.

"What the hell—!" Cranby exploded, staring blankly. "Where'd she go? Are we nuts, or—"

"Stolen! Kidnaped!" Hilt shrieked, jerking upright. "Don't you understand, man? This is Lanning's work! It must be!"

"But how on earth did he—?"

"Don't ask me! He's a scientist; I'm not—but I do know there is only one place on God's earth where he could pull a trick like this from and that's Valordom! Does he think he can get away with this, the rotten swine? Let me get my hands on him! Come on! We're leaving right now!"

"Wait a minute, man—hold on!" Cranby was his cool self again now. "How do you know this Maskelyne and Devant act was worked from Valordom? Might be local."

With a terrific effort Hilt forced himself to be calm. After thinking a moment he shook his head. "Couldn't be. He wouldn't pull anything like this in a modern city—the rap's too tough for kidnaping. It's Valordom, I tell you, where he's safe. And once he's got Eve there God knows what he'll do to her."

"Right!" Cranby fled for the door. "I'll finish things off with the domestic; you get the bus ready."

"It is ready. We were starting tomorrow, anyway . . . Step on it, will you?"

But Hilton was wrong in his beliefs. While he was so furiously denouncing Lanning the scientist himself was in the hangar annexed to his laboratory, putting the finishing touches to a small cylindrical affair some fifty feet long and six feet in diameter. Certainly he was not concerned about Eveta Hilton; at least not immediately. His plans were laid with true cunning to encompass events cast in the future.

His whole concentration was given over now to the completion of this thing upon which he had labored for over a week, working almost continuously night and day, taking his instructions from the words uttered by the loud-speaker connected with Valordom. Machines and electrical blast furnaces had enabled him to make his own castings and manufacture without recourse to outside aid.

He knew he proposed to take a desperate chance. This space projectile, controlled entirely by radio waves, might miss its objective and hurl him into the depths of space forever. On the other hand, if his calculations were correct, the automatic radio controls in his laboratory would function undisturbed and guide his ship, by prearranged calculation, across the void to Venus. Everything depended on that—everything. Again and again he had checked his mathematics, felt assured that there could be no mistake.

Again he went over the instruments, checked the mechanisms on his projectile. Satisfied, he started up the engine of the mobile cradle in which the vessel lay and drove the thing out into the open field outside. Yet again he went over every detail, then drove the now empty cradle back into the hangar and locked all doors securely from the outside.

Feeling like a man getting into his

own coffin he clambered into the narrow vessel and clamped the airlock tightly shut, sat down at the radio control board. His jaws set; his hand closed the switches. Instantly, the radio power generated from his laboratory reacted through the pickups. Effortlessly the projectile lifted from the ground, went speeding into the darkness of the night.

Smiling bitterly, Lanning watched Earth falling away from him with dizzying, sickening speed . . .

CHAPTER V

HILT READ sat sizzling in pent-up fury as he drove the radio-bus with demoniacal speed through the night. Far above the levels of ordinary airplane traffic, he forced the radio-bus forward with all the power of which it was capable, pressed himself and Cranby back in their sprung seats with chest crushing force. Faster the machine went, and faster, its engines singing to the smooth flow of power.

Hilt sat rigid, eyes on his instruments, only glancing occasionally at the world far below him. It was his wife who constantly floated before his vision—his wife, and Lanning. As he hurtled onwards he mentally considered what would be the slowest, most horrible way to kill the scientist. Cranby had little time for such thoughts: upon him rested the onus of keeping the course checked. At such dizzying speed any variation meant enormous loss of time in getting back to it.

"At this lick we should reach Valordom in six hours," he said presently.

"Less, if the damn thing will do it," Hilt grated back, pulling the power levers to maximum. Like a bullet the plane rocketed its way southwards, following an almost straight line. Below, the faint spots of lighted ships floated in the

sweeping vastness of the Atlantic.

In a little over an hour they had passed the Bahamas: an hour after that Porto Rico swept by in a blaze of little lights far below them. Once they encountered squalls and rain, went through them like a meteor, with windows streaming and engines howling a triumphant song.

The heat in the control cabin grew oppressive; Hilt felt himself getting cramp, but he drove on ruthlessly with sweat trickling down his determined face.

Another hour and they were over the Caribbean Sea, could see it below like molten silver in the full moonlight.

Four hours—and Caracas, on the North American coast. Five hours—and the southern frontiers of Venezuela . . . Then Brazil itself. With a diminishing speed they moved over the virgin jungle stretching out below.

"We want latitude 47 and longitude 15," Cranby said. "Keep going—I'll direct you . . ."

Hilt nodded briefly, stared fixedly through the windows in front of him, watching for the first glint of silver in the light of the moon. Again and again he altered the ship's position, moving now at a mere hundred to the hour. He zig-zagged in response to Cranby's instructions as he checked the map by the compass— Then he gave a sudden shout.

"There's Valordom! Right ahead!"

"And we can get ready to be bumped off," Hilt snapped. "If Lanning's in that city he'll pick us off like a fly, like Underwood used to do for a hobby when anybody got too near. Hold everything while we play tag with his radio disruption . . ."

BUT to the surprise of both of them there was no sign of attack from the city, though it was perfectly evident that the entire strange metropolis was

at work. There were lights in every building, no trace of flood waters. Either the waters had subsided or been forced under control.

Hilt frowned in some bewilderment as he drove the ship downward, heading for the flat landing roof in the north of the city. He made the landing perfectly, glanced at Cranby with a puzzled frown.

"Looks like Lanning doesn't know we're around," he said finally.

He sat pondering for a moment, then scrambled stiffly to his feet, took down revolvers and slipped them in his belt holsters. Silent, Cranby did likewise. In another moment they had the airlock open and stepped out into the flat roof . . . But the instant they did so they were seized from behind.

"Why, you—"

Hilt stopped helplessly, amazed to find that he was not being held by men but by the pincer hands of massive robots. He stood gazing at one of the things, at its square head, lenslike eyes, then at the metal mesh in its abdomen which evidently concealed the vital mechanisms.

"Take it easy, Hilt," Cranby murmured. "We can't fight this iron-mongery anyway. Too tough . . ."

Hilt hesitated a moment, breathing hard, then he relaxed. That was the signal for the robots to push them forward to the roof trapdoor. They were forced down the stairs, but not to street level. On the second floor they were led off down a corridor and through one of the machine halls they had seen on the previous visit, but this time the complicated mechanisms were all working with smooth, surging power. In baffled wonderment the two stared at them as they were marched past; then finally they were thrust through an adjoining doorway.

The robots released them, stood guard by the door.

IT TOOK Hilt about thirty seconds to absorb the scene in front of him. The place was an operating theater of advanced construction. As well as the usual paraphernalia of a modern surgery there were devices he could not hope to understand—immaculate, glittering instruments and machines, electrical devices, floodlamps by the myriad, all trained on one motionless, supine figure, strapped to a long table.

"Eve!" Hilt screamed hoarsely.

His dazed eyes shot from her motionless form to four golden hued men standing round her. They were watching him with steady eyes. He rushed forward frantically, but before he had covered half the length to the operating table he was seized by his particular robot captor from behind and held in a relentless grip.

"Excitable, obviously," one of the men said briefly, in the Venusian language.

"O. K., I know what you're saying!" Hilt snapped. "Eve—that girl you're butchering — taught me your damned language backwards—"

"Oh, so?" The man who had first spoken went on in his native language after Hilt's outburst in Venusian. "You are Hilton Read, of course—and this is your friend Cranby Doyle?"

"Never mind that! Where's Lanning? What are you doing to my wife?" Hilt's voice rose to a roar. "Who in blue blazes are you, anyway?"

"I am the Master," answered the man who had first spoken. "The Master of the Wanderers . . ." He glanced at his three companions.

"Don't hand me that!" Hilt snorted. "I've seen the Wanderers for myself, and they're insects! There's something phony about this, and Lanning must be back of it. Where is he?"

THE Master frowned. "Just who is this Lanning?" he asked pensively.

"You're asking *me!*" Hilt yelled, struggling again with utter futility. "Blast you, let my wife alone, can't you? Tell this robot to release me—"

"You will be held captive until we are finished," the Master snapped. "That you happened to arrive here at this juncture in our work is not our fault . . ." He glanced at his companions. "We will proceed," he stated briefly.

Though he swore and raved Hilt could do nothing but watch. He stood, eyes glaring, noting every move the men made. Much of it he could not understand, but he did sense a certain inner admiration at the calm efficiency with which they went to work. For an hour they busied themselves with their strange instruments, first bathed the girl from head to foot in the glare of a deep violet lamp, at the end of which immersion every portion of her skin had changed from its normal white to deep red-brown.

Then other instruments went to work on her skull. Curious sawlike devices made Hilt tremble with horrified rage as he saw them scalp the girl completely. She lay motionless, undisturbed. More rays came into action, laying nearly a half an inch thickness of synthetic tissue on her skull, onto which the living hair was regrafted so perfectly that she was unchanged, save for possessing a higher forehead than before.

The one who called himself the Master nodded at length, wiped his hands on a spotless towel and spoke sharply. A robot came forward from the surgery wall, lifted the girl in his metal arms after undoing the straps, and carried her out of sight.

"In God's name, what have you done to her?" Hilt shrieked, reverting to English in his extremity.

The Master answered in English without effort, spoke quietly. "We

have done things you cannot possibly alter, rest assured of that. However, since you have seen this part of the work you may as well see the rest."

He turned, and the robots, evidently drawn by telepathic force, followed him as he walked the length of the surgical laboratory. In the adjoining machine hall he walked directly to a long, cigar-shaped cylinder of glittering metal resting in a cradle at a forty-five degree angle. Hilt's dazed eyes followed the path the thing would take upon release. A portion of the roof had opened like an eye to the starry sky.

"What's the idea?" he panted, glancing round on thundering, whining machinery; then he looked around sharply as one of the golden men seated himself before a mammoth switchboard and made some control adjustments.

"Eveta is leaving here—for Venus!" the Master stated calmly.

"What! Look here, you can't get away with this! You infernal devil, I'll—"

Nearly sobbing with rage Hilt broke off as the robot who had carried the girl off suddenly reappeared, carrying her in his metal arms once more. But she was dressed now in a white tunic that covered her from head to foot. Her feet were shod with heavy soled shoes; round her slender waist was strapped a belt with a curious type of gun in it.

THE Master nodded as he inspected her, looked thoughtfully at her brown, unconscious face. With a brooding stare he watched her slack body eased through the projectile's airlock and lain full length on the floor inside. He closed the airlock himself, turned suddenly to one of his companions.

"Seven day anaesthesia?" he asked briefly.

"Unconscious until she arrives," answered the man addressed. "We can give her maximum. Heart and lung

strain minimized, of course."

The Master turned aside and raised his hand in a signal to the man at the control board. In alarm and bewilderment Hilt and Cranby watched the events that followed. Knife switches closed on the control board; weird mechanisms reacted at the foot of the projectile — then with incredible smoothness it swept up the forty-five degree metal slope and vanished through the hole in the roof amidst a faint gust of wind.

"She's—she's gone!" Hilt whispered, his face ghastly with shock. "She's gone!" he repeated with a bellow of rage. "By Heaven, you've done it! You've fired her to Venus!"

"To fulfil a definite purpose," the Master said, with implacable calm. "Nothing you can do will alter our motives, Hilton Read. You are dealing with scientists—master-scientists!"

"Devils! Filthy devils all of you!"

"At least give us an explanation," Cranby exclaimed. "After all, Eveta is his wife . . . Or daren't we ask questions?"

The Master considered for a moment, then he shrugged. "You have imagined me as ruthless," he said slowly. "In that you do me an injustice. I have sentiments, finer feelings, but I will not have my plans interfered with through a misunderstanding of the real facts. There is too much at stake for that."

Hilt laughed bitterly. "At any rate you're a liar to start with," he grated back. "The Wanderers are insects in a sealed cavern far under this city. I've seen them—so has Cranby."

"I know all you both did in this city, young man," the Master smiled. "That is why I am willing to tell you so much now. I realize how you saved a vital experiment by saving Eveta from the flood . . . You see, electric eyes in the machine rooms recorded everything that

ever happened through all the generations we were asleep . . . I know of the treachery of Underwood, of my people's efforts to overthrow him, of the flood. It was during the flood that our long sleep came to an end. Mentally, we have explored the cosmos from end to end—by a projection of mind-images into the void. You cannot fully understand that, perhaps, but you will know that there is no barrier to mind. It can travel anywhere. What we learned does not concern you, but we did discover among other things that the original plague which drove us from our home world of Venus has long ago ended. Venus can be tenanted again . . .

"We awoke, found the flood was with us, surrounding and burying our cavern. But we had instruments in the cave which cleared the water; heat rays turned it into dispersing steam; other rays sealed the geysers forever and produced harmless outlets for the inner pressures. Valordom is no longer threatened. So finally we emerged into a dry city. As we had expected, there were certain difficulties in our having insectile bodies; the other earthly bodies were much less cumbersome. We found four perfect but dead bodies in the flood remains and utilized them, surgically changed our brains into them and so took them over. I hope that explains one of the things that seem to baffle you?"

HILT nodded slowly at the faint mockery in the Master's eyes.

"Yeah, I can imagine your super hacksaws doing that all right. But where does Eveta fit in? What did you have to pick on her for?"

"Before we went into voluntary seclusion for mental projection we left life cultures in the city here to evolve," the Master resumed slowly. "We knew they would be fully evolved men and women by the time we awoke, and

thereby suitable to be projected back to Venus to take over their natural life on that planet. In the meantime they would be unconscious guardians of Valordom. That, I know, they have been—until Underwood arrived. But even he could not understand the machines we had sealed up . . . Our recovery from sleep revealed the disconcerting fact that our hoped for race to recolonize Venus had been wiped out in the flood. Not a living soul remained! There was only one way—we must create life cultures again on Venus!

"That we have done. Hurtling to Venus from our machines at this very moment are agitation waves projected along an electromagnetic beam timed to keep Venus perpetually within focus. The cultures have long since been fired; the agitation waves will do the rest and excite life into them. But this time we have made differences in our system. When we created life cultures in Valordom here we allowed evolution to take its natural course; this time we are sending forth to Venus metabolism radiations as well, radiations such as exist in the cosmic waves and are directly responsible for evolution. On Venus those cultures will evolve at tremendous speed: evolution will telescope generations into weeks. These machines you see around you are doing that at this moment. . . ."

Hilt and Cranby said nothing. They were awed by the terrific scientific powers the Master hinted at.

"But to rule these cultures, these people who have evolved, we needed a true heritage Venusian," the Master went on. "No other would do. The king or queen of Venus—like any other king or queen—must be one by direct racial descent. None were left in Valordom: we could not go ourselves because of the necessity for controlling the machines from this end. Then our instruments showed just one had escaped Val-

ordom to the outer world. That one was Eveta. . . .”

Hilt frowned, just beginning to appreciate how completely Victor Lanning had dropped out of his calculations.

“Our detector instruments found Eveta’s exact energy wavelength,” the Master resumed. “The rest was easy. Our system was reintegration over a distance. For an example, you are aware that the stars can break down matter in their inner cores into energy, and then build up that energy into matter again?”

“I’ve heard Eddington refer to it,” Hilt mused. “The cyclic scheme of the universe itself, isn’t it?”

“PRECISELY, and it can be reproduced on a small scale on earth. It is much the same as television, whereby an image is broken down into electrons and rebuilt later into the original image, at a distance. We directed the necessary breakdown vibration to the exact spot where Eveta stood according to our instruments. She was disintegrated into a compact mass of electrons, energy, and component vibrations—everything that went to make up her body and brain. Magnetism drew those assembled components back here. She was reintegrated without harm, just like a television receiver reassembles a transmitted scene.”

“And the operation?” Hilt asked bitterly.

“A mere nothing. We pigmented Eveta’s skin and thickened the bone and tissue of her skull to prevent it being affected by the intense solar radiations that stream down through Venus’ cloudbanks. Since she is to spend her life there she has to be physically fitted for it. The other thing we did was slightly alter the receptive centers of her brain to make her immediately responsive to hypnotic orders. She will be quite unconscious until she reaches

the planet. Thereafter she will follow out our orders, projected across space to affect her brain. She will marshal together the evolved Venusian cultures, rebuild a magnificent race to whom, little by little, she will reveal all our secrets. The *valsix* city we had on Venus still stands: over that she will take supreme command. It is equipped with machines embodying every necessity of science.”

“And just what do you four figure on doing?” Cranby asked briefly, as Hilt remained silent.

“When we are sure that Eveta is the undisputed queen we shall voluntarily die, go into the cosmos to continue our mental excursions, away from trammeling bodies. We are incredibly old, but we must have others to carry on our heritage. We could have done it here on earth, of course, but it could have meant mastering Earthlings, upsetting their rightful planet. We do not wish that. We are scientists, not tyrants.”

There was a long silence in the laboratory as the Master ceased talking.

“Listen,” said Hilt slowly, “will you grant me one thing? Let me go and join my wife on Venus? My friend and I? We could help a lot.”

The Master’s lips set in an adamant line. “That is a matter of opinion. You could also undo the work of generations. I do not doubt your earnestness, but you could upset things unintentionally. I cannot afford to take that risk—at least not until Eveta is firmly established as queen. Until that time you will both remain in Valordom as prisoners. You will have every comfort, so long as you do not try to escape or do anything rash. . . . For the time being, my friends, that it all. The robots will telepathically obey my orders and give you all you need. And do not try to escape. The whole city is manned with machine men, and they all have certain instructions and duties to fulfill. . . .”

"And suppose people come looking for us?"

The Master smiled. "They will be in the same plight. . . ."

He made a motion to the robots and turned aside. Helpless, Hilt and Cranby found themselves marched away.

CHAPTER VI

IN so far as every comfort was concerned, the Master kept his word.

Hilt and Cranby found themselves kept through the succeeding days in a magnificent apartment with everything they could wish for—good food, soft beds, a balcony where they could take exercise, sun themselves, or gaze out over the recontrolled city. They had everything, except freedom—and the more he dwelt on that the more savage Hilt got.

It was on the fourth night of captivity that his rage boiled over. With furious eyes he stared at the sky, at Venus low down in the west over the city's further distances. The planet hung motionless in the calm tropic air. Bitterly, he dropped his gaze to the ceaseless, throbbing industry of the city.

"Machines!" he whispered. "Machines, Cran, controlling the girl I love, guiding her to a blasted world that doesn't matter two jots, ruling her brain to make her the queen of a collection of lousy cultures—My God, the Master can't get away with this!"

"Unless I'm cockeyed he's doing all right so far," Cranby sighed.

"So far, yes—but listen!" Hilt glanced back into the room where the robot stood motionless guard by the door. "Do you figure, as I have been doing, that that iron man's vitals are in his middle behind the mesh? Suppose we took a chance, put him out of action, and headed for the main lab? It's

only two doors down the passage. We could perhaps get the Master on the hop and force him to—"

Cranby shook his head. "Too risky, Hilt. He'll know all about it long before we get to him. There are no flies on that gentleman."

"But suppose he's so busy thinking about other things that he thinks we're innocuous?" Hilt's jaw set obstinately. "I'm going to risk it! I'll go nuts if I don't get action of some sort!"

"O.K., I'm with you!"

Cranby squared his shoulders as they strolled back together into the great room.

For a moment or two Hilt roamed around with apparent casualness, his eyes on a heavy metal vase on the table by the doorway. As he passed by it he suddenly whisked it up and whirled into action, slammed it with all his force into the robot's metal-mesh middle. Instantly those enormous arms reached out towards him, struck him with pile-driver force. He whirled around, struggling frantically, clawing at the cover on the divan and wrapping it round his fist.

Even as he performed the action those appalling arms crushed him tight; evidently some mechanical reflex action was so devised in case of such attack. Cranby hurtled to the fray with a chair, whirled it savagely at the robot's face and smashed off the eye-lenses.

Straining with cracking lungs against the constricting force, Hilt hammered his protected right fist furiously into the half cracked mesh. Twice, three times—then he felt his hand go clean through, was thankful for the cover's protection as he felt glass go splintering to atoms under the force of his thrust.

That crushing pressure relaxed. He staggered free just in time as the heavy metal mass toppled over to the floor. Wires, glass shards, and curious cogs

sprinkled out of the shattered middle.

"Oke?" Cranby panted.

"Yeah! Come on!"

Hilt slammed back the door bolt, whirled himself out into the passage and raced along it with desperate speed to the second doorway. At the precise moment of his arrival the door opened and a golden man looked out inquiringly. He received an answer immediately as a hamlike fist struck him full between the eyes and sent him slithering backwards into the laboratory.

LIKE a whirlwind Hilt raced in, knocked another of the scientists flying in his headlong rush, slid to a halt as the Master himself twirled round from his master control board. A powerful arm hooked itself under his chin, dragged him backwards over the stool to the floor. Only then did Hilt change his hold, transfer his fingers to the scientist's throat.

"I'll find the odd man out!" Cranby shouted, prowling round with clenched fists.

Hilt grinned bitterly as he stared down at the Master. "This, big shot, is *my* party," he murmured. "Either you do what I say for a change or I'll choke the damned life out of you! I punctured your blasted robot, anyway—"

"You—fool!" the Master gulped out hoarsely. "This won't help you! If you kill me your wife will die as well. Upon me relies her entire safety. Let me up, you—"

"You're going to bring her back," Hilt breathed. "You sent her off, so you can recall her by the same method. And I'll stand over you while you do it—yes, even if it takes days and nights on end. She hasn't got to Venus yet; you can still recall her ship. Now, how 'bout it? Shall I tighten my hold or—"

He relaxed his fingers again as the Master gulped and choked.

"Don't you realize—" he started to say; then he stopped as a loud speaker suddenly came into life and gushed forth a hurry of Venusian words. Cranby twirled round, uncertain: Hilt remained where he was, still alert but listening.

"Master, something is wrong! Come quickly! The X-ray telescope shows that somebody is already within our Venusian city! Apparently an Earth man. He seems to have control . . . I cannot understand it. Eveta will not reach the planet for another day yet. Our cultures are grown to full maturity . . . Come to the observatory quick!"

"Victor Lanning!" Hilt shouted hoarsely, springing to his feet. "By God, it *must* be Lanning!"

"So that's where our playmate went," Cranby mused.

The Master got slowly to his feet, fingering his throat. Hilt looked at him grimly.

"Now you've got to do something!" he snapped out.

The scientist bit his lip in vexation. "Just who is this Lanning person you keep referring to?" he demanded.

"Partner of Underwood's—they were hand in glove. Seems Underwood used to contact him by radio and always used a number. That's probably why you don't know anything about him . . . If any man can queer your pitch on Venus he can!"

* "But how could he have *got* to Venus?" the Master asked in bewilderment. "How could he have known of our plans . . . Unless—" His lips began to tighten. "Wait! I believe I have it! I know Underwood rooted out most of our radio secrets; even if he did not understand them himself it is very probable that this Lanning person did. Somehow he must have put together our radio voice pickup system. In that case he must have overheard the plans I made with my colleagues

for the formation of a Venusian dynasty with Eveta as queen, must have heard how to build a radio spaceship . . . Must have heard everything!" he finished hoarsely.

HILT frowned. "Even if he did do all that he wouldn't take that risk just to control Venusians or get at Eveta," he grunted. "Last I heard of him he was nuts about *valsix* metal. What about this city of yours on Venus? It's *valsix* as well, isn't it?"

"Certainly."

"Hmm. Well, I guess he can get *valsix* ideas from there as well as he can from Valordom. What then was the real attraction that drove him over space? Conquest of Venus, maybe? He loves power, does Lanning . . . Listen, did you and the others mention anything in your discussions likely to sound like tempting bait to an Earthling? I mean, anything of value on Venus?"

The Master pondered for a long time. "I believe we mentioned carbon," he said at length. "Yes—carbon, of value to us for scientific reasons, in which Venus richly abounds. And of value to an Earthling because of the possibilities for diamonds! I wonder if that—"

Hilt snapped his fingers. "You've hit it! Diamonds, *valsix*, and control of Venus through Eveta— Gosh, what a scheme! The dirty skunk!"

He swung around as Cranby came forward with a grim face. Behind him came the two other scientists who had been knocked out. Not a moment later the fourth man came through the doorway and raced across. He flashed a brief glimpse at the two Earthmen, then at the Master.

"Master, you got my message?" he asked anxiously. "What are we going to do? This interloper can ruin everything for which we've struggled so long. We must—"

"He must know every one of our plans," the Master pondered. "And we cannot get at him with hypnotism machinery because his brain is not prearranged for that purpose. We might hypnotize Eveta to destroy him, but against that we have his various resources to think of. He would probably destroy her first. When Eveta gets there—"

"Listen a moment!" Hilt broke in tensely. "You've got to reconsider your whole setup. Lanning is my meat, and Eveta is my wife. That's a guarantee of good faith if ever there was one. Let me go with Cranby to Venus and clean up the mess. I'll fix Lanning somehow."

"And steal Eveta, of course?" the Master asked quietly.

Hilt shrugged. "I frankly confess I'd do it if it would do any good, but where's the use? You've got scientific powers that can always find her, or me, whenever you choose. I can't fight you, Master, so I'm asking for another thing—the chance to be by my wife's side while she carries out her task. I'll bring Eveta back here to Valordom: by that time you may have some other ideas. I'll prove my loyalty anyway . . . If you don't agree to my idea your plans are ruined by Lanning anyway. But if you do agree you can save your scheme and I can get my wife. If that isn't logical let's have your ideas."

For a long minute the Master looked at Hilt's grim face steadily. Then he nodded impassively.

"Very well. Circumstances compel me to give assent. But remember, I place you on your honor to return Eveta to Valordom here. If you can do that I may possibly find . . . other ways."

"Right!" Hilt's eyes shone. "But I've a condition to make. Don't use any hypnotism on Eveta, otherwise it might upset my plans for getting

her. Leave her mind free to make her own decisions."

"You have my promise on that," the Master nodded. "The robots will prepare a machine right away for both of you. It will be similar to the one in which you flew here. Radio will drive it across the gulf, generated by these engines. Afterwards you will call on your own power reserve. In like manner you will leave Venus. Your engines will lift you above Venus; our radio powers will draw you back. You will be constantly under observation in the X-ray telescope's field."

"Why bother about another ship?" Cranby put in mildly. "Why can't we use the one we've always used? We're sort of friendly with it by now."

THE Master shrugged. "If you wish it. It is still on the roof where you left it. I will have the engine tanks filled to capacity, provisions and arms loaded aboard, and the radio apparatus carefully checked . . . Now go and make whatever personal preparations you desire and be ready to leave within an hour . . ."

IT WAS midnight when Hilt and Cranby climbed through the airlock of their vessel on the flat departure roof. The four Venusian scientists, all ideas of enmity banished from their minds now in view of this greater trouble, bowed slight acknowledgments of farewell.

"Both of you are brave men," the Master said quietly. "Venus is by no means a pleasant world, as you will discover."

"It's my wife I'm thinking of," Hilt retorted, and with that he slammed the airlock shut, settled beside Cranby at the controls.

At the first touch on the switches the radio power generated from the city had instant effect. With every mounting

velocity the little vessel tore upwards into the starry night. Valordom fell away in shining spires far below.

Upwards, through troposphere and stratosphere and out through the Heavyside Layer. The purple of the night vanished and gave place to star-dusted blackness. Vibration and tremor left the hosts of heaven and they became solitary, glittering points, friendless, incomprehensible. Below, the earth decreased from a tangled landscape to a concave sphere.

Despite the urgency of their mission, it was an unforgettable experience to the two. Spellbound, they watched through the windows, pressed themselves flat in their seats to ease the strain of constant acceleration. Here in free space their speed mounted by leaps and bounds. Both became aware of laboring hearts and swimming brains.

"I expected something like this," Hilt growled at last, staring blearily at the diamond-bright spot of Venus directly ahead of them in the firmament. "The radio control will keep the ship going, anyway. We'll have to relax into unconsciousness if we're to make the right speed."

No word came from Cranby: he was unconscious already. With a vast effort Hilt moved the radio levers to maximum then lay back. The ship surged forward again . . . Hilt's senses swam in darkness.

SO THROUGH hours punctuated with wakefulness and coma, interspersed with violent attacks of sickness and nausea, they fled across the 60,000,000 mile abyss, only began slackening their hurtling rush when Earth had decreased to a flamboyant green star behind and Venus filled all space in front of them—glaring white with its heaped up banks of eternal cloud.

Slower Hilton went, and slower, as they neared the clouds. He was using

the ordinary engines now, waiting for the first grip of atmosphere. He stared below with narrowed eyes, kept his hands tight on the controls for immediate action.

Then with a sudden roaring jolt the ship struck the first layer of atmosphere, slowed up enormously with the friction. Instantly Hilt transferred the power to the propellers . . . Gently he nosed his way down through the blanketing mist, eyes glued to the window, Cranby's lean, taut visage next his own.

FOR hours they seemed to do nothing but stare at their own reflections while mildew ran down the glass. Then, amazingly, the world was suddenly clear in front of them. With grim eyes they stared down on a landscape steamy with heat, lush with vegetation of riotous size, broken here and there by plateaus of obviously volcanic nature.

"Swell place for a weekend party," Cranby remarked. "Looks like the Earth in the Carboniferous stage."

"Maybe you've got something there," Hilt retorted. "This may be Venus' Carboniferous Era." He glanced at the instruments. "External temperature 130° F. That puts Sierra Leone right in the polar regions by comparison. Wonder what part of the day it is? Seven hundred and twenty hours of day here, you know. Same length of night."

"No kiddin'," said Cranby solemnly. "I know all that, you dope!"

Hilt leveled the ship out, sped on monotonously over the torrid swamps. Now and again monstrous shapes loomed out of those waters below, vanished again in a wallow of bubbles. The country over which they were passing looked like a nightmare Garden of Eden. Poisonous-hued flowers reared ugly heads from the morass. Trees like titanic pineapples bulged on what little solid ground there was. There were interlacings of verdure reaching down into

thick undergrowth, through the midst of which coiled and writhed revolting shapes.

"The Master knew his onions when he said Venus wasn't pleasant," Cranby grunted presently. "The city must be apart from this stuff, surely?"

Hilt made no response, kept his eyes fixed ahead—then at last the swampy region began to diminish, gave way to landscape that looked like the floor of a volcano. Bare, reddish rocks were everywhere. From amidst them spurted clouds of scalding steam. Chasms of unimaginable depth yawned in all directions, some filled with raging waters, others with mud which spawned all manner of diabolical, twisting life.

"Pretty obvious where Venus gets its clouds from," Hilt said after a while. "All this damned internal activity keeps the sky forever bottled up."

"With the sun so near, thank Heaven for that," Cranby growled.

More miles of ravines and deadly gorges—then suddenly Hilt gave a cry and stared ahead. "Hey, take a look! Am I nuts or is that a wall over there? A metal wall at that!"

"You're right!" Cranby whistled. Fascinated they stared at its colossal height. For five hundred feet it reared into the air, invincible, sunk Heaven knew how far deep into the rocky plateau. Not a sign of any city was visible beyond it as yet; it reared too high for that.

"They sure don't mean any of these mud animals getting past," Hilt said. "Nor us either, for that matter—if we hadn't got the ship, that is . . ." He looked down morosely on the chasms below.

"We can fly over the wall, anyway," Cranby observed.

"Yes, and be spotted right away. Remember, Lanning won't be expecting us, and on that hinges our chance of success. We daren't fly over the wall;

it's too risky. There's got to be another way."

Hilt stared at the top of the wall thoughtfully, his eyes narrowing as he noted the turretlike projections at regular intervals along it, probably containing weapons of attack for use against the mud monsters if they ever attempted a serious invasion.

"It's our ship that will give us away if seen," he resumed; "but if we wait until dark and then drop a cable noose round one of those turrets we'll have a rope to climb up with. We can scale the wall and get down the other side. Leave the ship on this side where it isn't seen."

"You've got something there. And once we're over the wall?"

"With darkness for seven twenty hours we'll find something we can do. I'm dropping right now. . . ."

Hilt dipped the ship's nose, pushed the helicopter screws in action. Gently the vessel sank at the base of that titanic mass, some four yards from the edge of a steaming chasm.

CHAPTER VII

EVIDENTLY they had arrived in the Venusian evening, for to their satisfaction another hour brought a gradual dimming of the light: thirty minutes after that the daylight vanished entirely and gave place to thick, steamy night.

Hilt aroused himself, sat before the control board again and sent the ship upwards once more. Level with the wall he fixed the vessel in a stationary position and stood for a moment gazing out over the wilderness of city beyond. It was lighted, amazingly industrious, looked like Valordom itself. In fact, in design, it was a duplicate of Valordom in its entirety. Even the buildings

were laid out in the same way.

Turning, he opened the floor trap. Immediately, steamy, suffocating warmth came surging into the control room. Slowly he payed out the emergency cable, lowering it to the metal projection fifty feet below, dropped the noose squarely over it then allowed the free end to fall over the wall's outside. The thing was done.

To lower the ship back to the plateau and climb out onto the plain was only the work of minutes. The pair of them, laden with food haversacks and guns toiled slowly through the enervating heat, came at last to that wire reaching down from the heights.

"You first," Hilt said briefly.

Cranby nodded, took hold of the wire and went up swiftly, feet braced against the wall. Hilt turned to follow him, then swung round at a sudden sound from behind him. He caught a vision of a monstrous, sinuous shape surging out of the mist. Some nightmare object, bearing unpleasant similarity to a sea-serpent, had squirmed out of the mud chasm.

Instantly he clutched the cable, fought his way up with frantic speed, saw that vile head receding below him.

"What's eating you?" Cranby demanded, staring down. Then he saw the thing too in the gloomy miasma below. "Uh-uh! No wonder they built this damned wall!

He went up again, hand over hand stopping ever and again with a scissor grip around the cable. It seemed infinite miles to the top of that wall, but at last they both made it, staggered exhausted and sweat drenched to its broad summit, gazed along its deserted endless length. It was pretty clear that it entirely encircled the city.

"Let's take stock of our assets," Hilt said, when he had recovered his breath. "This city is an exact replica of Valordom—or rather vice versa. Anyway,

we know from that that the layout of buildings is the same. That cuts down time to an enormous extent. Eveta will have arrived by now — but point is, which building will she be in?"

"One of the machine rooms?" Cranby hazarded. "That's where Lanning will be, sure as eggs."

"Try anyway . . ."

HILT tugged out his guns, examined them, then thrust them back in their holsters. Carefully he pulled the cable up and dropped it down the other side of the wall. With swift silence they both slid to the ground below and again contemplated the city.

At last Hilt set off rapidly through the steamy shadows, revolver ready in his hand . . . That started both of them on a slow, painstaking sojourn amidst rock and earth, taking them surreptitiously round the edge of the city as they angled for position to find the corresponding position as they had experienced it in Valordom. It was an hour later when they came to it. Before them were the lighted buildings that could only be the machine halls.

"Won't be too easy," Cranby grunted. "People around— Or are they people, anyway? Those insect-things. They're natural Venusians, aren't they?"

"Yeah; guess that's how the cultures would evolve on this world, with different conditions. Eveta, queen of those things!" Hilt gave an involuntary shudder. "Hell—no!"

"Just what is *that*?"

Cranby pointed ahead. Perhaps half a mile from them, apart from the city, floodlights were blazing up from a hollow of the ground into the murky sky. Hilt frowned as he studied it.

"Darned if I know. Might be worth a look, though. Come on."

Ten minutes brought them to the spot. Lying flat on the ground they

stared into a narrow, shelving valley. It was swarming with insect people, busy with apparatus. Drilling machines bored into rocks; trucks and conveyors worked industriously—and amidst them all stood a human figure in snow white, black hair sweeping her shoulders. Curtly she was snapping out commands in the Venusian language.

"Evel!" Hilt gasped, twisting an astounded face to Cranby. "Of all the unimaginable luck! We can—"

"No, we can't!" Cranby hissed, dragging him down again. "Do a bit of thinking, you fathead. We can't just snatch her from amidst all those creatures! We've got to work carefully or we'll muss the whole thing up."

"I'm for taking a chance!"

"Then you'll do it alone," Cranby retorted doggedly. "I'm not scared of dangers, you know that—but I do like things properly organized. Be yourself, Hilt! One false move and the skids are under us for keeps."

"Well . . . mebbe you're right." Hilt subsided into grumbling silence.

"Just what the dickens is she doing anyway?" Cranby asked presently.

Surprise began to register very gradually on Hilt's grim face. The insectile beings were busy loading the material they had dug up into the conveyors: thence it was taken by automatic means to a hidden point in the city itself. The stuff was black—black as soot.

"Carbon!" Cranby ejaculated suddenly. "Pure carbon! Must be a whole area of it around here or something—"

"I get it," Hilt broke in. "Look at Eve—that isn't her normal way of doing things, standing there with a ramrod back snapping out orders. She's under hypnotism, that's what—Lanning's hypnotism. Don't you see the angle? He knew she was coming as queen of this outfit; he knew these insects would follow her orders for that

very reason. Since the Venusians back on Earth aren't hypnotizing Eve, Lanning's doing it instead, ordering the mining of carbon, and incidentally getting Lord knows how many carbon deposits . . . The double faced swine!"

"Infernally ingenious, if you ask me," Cranby sighed. "I wonder why I wasn't born with brains like that instead of being purely good looking? Of course, we daren't snatch her away from here for another reason," he went on seriously. "There'll be a circuit which will break on Lanning's switchboard—wherever it is—if we interrupt her mental flow. Best thing we can do is follow her, watch where she goes. It'll perhaps lead us to Lanning and it's him we've got to be rid of!"

"Guess you're right." It took Hilt a good deal of personal effort to make that admission—but the sanity of Cranby's notion was obvious enough.

THEY waited for perhaps an hour, then leaving the insect men at work the girl suddenly turned away from their midst and walked with a steady, somnabulistic tread out of the depression, turned towards the city. Instantly Hilt jumped to his feet, followed at a safe distance behind her, Cranby right beside him. They followed the girl's walk all the way back to the city itself, watched her finally turn into a single building ablaze with light.

"Now what?" Cranby breathed quickly.

"The building's a single-floor one," Hilt muttered, with a keen look. "See those skylights on the roof? I'm going up there; maybe I'll see something."

"Stars probably if Lanning spots you. Granting he's in there."

"He'll be in there O. K., and I'll risk the stars . . ."

Against the wall at the building's rear they paused. Hilt studied the edifice for a moment or two, measuring the

niches between the welded plates. There was toe and fingerhold, but only just.

"Oke!" he whispered, and immediately Cranby bent down and made his back into a stepping up platform.

In another moment Hilt was climbing up, straining his powerful muscles. Plate by plate he went up, scrambled over the edge of the fifty foot height at last, wriggled his way onto the sloping roof. To reach the nearest skylight was only the matter of minutes. Below, he saw a wilderness of light-drenched machines. It was the same at the second skylight; then at the third one he moved cautiously. For one thing it was unmistakably open. For another a voice floated to him, in English—the familiar voice of Victor Lanning.

Hilt moved along gently, applied his eyes to the skylight crack. Warm, stifling air hot with oil reek came floating from the laboratory's interior. His eyes centered on the figure of Eveta immediately below him. At this end of the laboratory a raised platform of machines had brought the floor level far nearer the roof . . . Facing the girl, attired in white ducks and smiling frozenly, was Lanning. His hand rested on the switch of a complicated apparatus.

. . . and you will sleep," he was saying softly. "You will never realize that you were sent here to colonize a world. Your duty, all the time you are here, is to force these beings to mine carbon. As much of it as they can get! You will see to it that they load it properly, that arrangements are made for it to be transported back in adequate sized space machines. You are their queen, and you in turn will always do as I say."

"I will have the beings mine carbon. I will always do as you say. I am the queen," Eveta repeated mechanically.

Lanning eyed her steadily. "When you have rested you will eat, then re-

sume work on the mining of carbon."

SHE repeated the sentence like a parrot, standing erect and motionless. Hilt felt his neck getting hotter. Carefully he erased his hand around for his right side automatic: here was the chance he needed. One shot, and Lanning would be winged, disabled. Then back to earth with him and snatch Eveta clear of the whole mess.

Hilt drew carefully, nosed the muzzle of the gun towards the crack—but at that identical moment his heavy boot slipped against the metal plate of the roof on which it was insecurely braced. Helplessly he slid backwards, revolver flying out of his hand. Like a sack of coals he fell over the roof edge, dropped to the ground with a jar that shook every bone in his body.

"What happened?" Cranby came pelting out of the mist, hauled him to his feet. "Hilt, what in—"

Hilt winced, rubbing his back. "My blasted foot slipped and—"

"Stand exactly where you are!" a bitter voice snapped out of the gloom.

They obeyed, scowled as Lanning himself came quietly into view, a ray-gun in his hand. He gave a distinct start as he beheld the two; then just as quickly recovered his composure.

"So it was *you* who made the noise on the roof," he murmured, his voice cold and cutting. "Well, how very interesting!" Stepping forward he snatched Hilt's remaining gun out of its holster, disarmed Cranby. Then he went on slowly, "I don't pretend to know what brought you to Venus, how you so cleverly walked into my field of activity—but I do know you will not get away with it! I'll have your space machine found and destroyed, or put out of your reach . . . Turn around!"

Had not the thought of Eveta's helplessness recurred to his mind Hilt would have ignored the order, risked the ray

gun to beat the living daylight out of Lanning. But he dare not take the chance . . . He turned, face set like granite, with Cranby beside him. They marched into the expanse of laboratory. Eveta was still there, regarding them with blank unrecognition.

"Stand there!" Lanning commanded, jerked his head towards the wall; then after locking the door he flashed his cold eyes at the girl and walked to his switchboard, placing his ray-gun in her hand.

"If they make a single suspicious move shoot to kill," he ordered implacably. "You will make these two men walk to the edge of the cliff near the carbon deposit workings. See that they are thrown over the cliff into the mud below. The monsters will finish the rest. Collect some workers from the carbon mines to help you."

Eveta repeated every word. Hilt stared helplessly at her blank, expressionless face—then he swung to Lanning.

"What the hell's the idea?" he shouted. "If you're so darned set on bumping us off why can't you do it cleanly—with a gun?"

Lanning smiled. "I forgot to add something," he said icily. "When I first came here my presence was resented by these insectile people. I was forced to lock myself in here until Eveta arrived. Since then she has followed out my orders whilst I can stay in hiding. If *you* and Cranby are thrown over the cliff in true spectacular style the insects will believe it is *me* and a friend. They have seen nobody else land here. That will divert their unwelcome attentions from this power house . . . you see? I will see to it that Eveta lets them believe such to be the case. . . ."

HE turned to the girl again. "You will tell the people that the impos-

ter has been found by you, together with his colleague. You have ordered them to be destroyed. Repeat that!"

She did so. Hilt swung back to her.

"Eve, in God's name, you can't do this! I'm your husband, Hilt! Look here—"

"If you move any closer, imposter, I shall kill you where you stand," she said tonelessly, as he unwittingly took a step towards her.

"Lanning, this is your blasted work!" Hilt raved. "That switchboard there forces her to take your orders. Amplified hypnosis acting on her already prepared brain. God, I'll get you for this Lanning if I have to crawl back from hell to do it!"

"Definitely it *will* be from hell," the scientist said dryly. "The mud chasms of Venus are no place for entertainment. All right, Eveta, get going!"

She walked forward deliberately. Perforce the two had to go in front of her. As he walked outside Hilt toyed with the idea of springing round and overpowering her, but he caught Cranby's eye.

"Better not," he muttered. "That ray gun isn't like a revolver. She just can't miss, and one whiff from that and—Blooy! Take it easy; we'll think of something."

Hilt tried the other alternative. He pleaded with the girl as he walked, tried every possible verbal means he could think of to break the iron hypnosis that held her. But it was useless. She marched on, set-faced, that gun held in her steady hand.

As they passed the carbon workings she uttered a sharp command, went on reeling off in the native tongue the whole tissue of lies about imposters. That was sufficient to bring a dozen of the strange creatures hurtling up the slope. Hilt forgot everything and slashed out with his mighty fists. Cranby jumped to aid him . . . They fin-

ished up in the grip of pincer claws, were lifted, whirled steadily along.

"Guess it didn't work," Cranby panted. "In fact I'd say we're going no place at the dickens of a speed. Try the lingo on them, man! Tell 'em the truth. It's the last chance!"

"Hey, you mugs—!" Hilt roared; then he remembered and switched to Venusian. But he only got about four words out then a roar of savage fury drowned him out.

"I have a lurking suspicion these insects didn't like Lanning coming here," Cranby jerked out. "Judging from the way they're yelling at us, that is. Which reminds me—"

He stopped. Hilt, too, felt the hair rise on his scalp as the end of the short plateau suddenly came into sight through the mist wreaths. Without pause the insectile creatures hurled him forward, suddenly released him. He went flying out helplessly into space with Cranby only a few feet away from him.

They seemed to fall a vast distance, landed finally with tremendous force in warm mud. It felt like tepid molasses. It surged into their ears, stopped up their nostrils. With frantic effort Hilt beat his way to the surface.

"Cran!" he bellowed hoarsely. "Cran, where are you?"

THERE was no answer, but a surging of the mud a foot or two away sent him striking towards it with mighty overarm strokes. It was like swimming in glue. He caught Cranby by the hair, tugged him upwards with superhuman power.

"Swim!" Hilt bellowed frantically. "Swim—keep going—anything to stop this mud getting a grip. I'll help you. . . ."

He struck out with fiendish force, dragging the threshing Cranby along with him. Dimly through the murk he

could see the rearing mass of the cliff at the chasm's other side—but between it and them were dark, elusive nightmare creatures that stirred in the unholy filth. To the right of them a head from Hades reared upwards in the mist; giant eyes watched them.

"A—a saurian like that thing we saw on the plateau," Cranby gurgled, then he battled on again. The mud heaved and rocked around them both as the monster brute suddenly plunged towards them.

"Down!" Hilt screamed, and they went down together, fought on with bursting lungs through a clogged mass of thin ooze that was hellishly agitated by the plungings of the monster. They felt it pass around them with waves that almost stunned their senses.

When lack of air forced them to the surface again the thing had floundered past.

The whole area seemed to be surging now with diabolical shapes. Time and again they were forced to submerge out of sight, heading all the time towards that frowning cliff, until at last to their infinite relief they felt shingle grinding under their feet. Exhausted, weighted down with mud, they floundered up the narrow beach.

But even here there was no respite. Small objects like serpents came squirming out of the morass after them. With bursting hearts and lungs they raced up a slope, floundered more by luck than judgment into the small mouth of a natural cave.

Here at last things were quieter. They stood breathing like donkey engines, smearing the mud off their faces and arms.

"Well, we do live in stirring times," Cranby sighed at last. "If I start to look like Adonis after that mud bath let me know, will you? And incidentally we have your prize biceps to thank for getting us out of the mess. Thanks

a lot, Hilt—you saved my life."

"Oh, quit being heroic," Hilt snorted. He stared back at the surging swamp life. "We've been as near death as we ever shall be, I guess. Lanning underestimated two things—my strength and the consistency of the mud . . . We're going back to the city, Cran. We've still work to do!"

"You don't have to tell me—but there'd better be a better way than over that swamp. We'd never make it a second time . . . Personally, I'm for trying this tunnel. Might lead to the surface somehow. They usually do."

They turned into the darkness of the tunnel behind them. The further they plunged into its blackness the more they could feel that it rose constantly on a steady gradient. Down it blew distinct drafts of fresh air—as fresh as Venus could produce, anyway. Encouraged, they hurried on, emerged at last onto another ledge beyond which lay a further chasm of abysmal depth. Hilt glanced upwards, then gave a cry.

"Look! We're practically at the top of the cliff face! A few yards up this rockery and we'll make it! Come on!"

IMMEDIATELY Cranby followed him along the rock acclivity, blundered up behind him as they came onto level plain. Cautiously they moved forward and for a moment the eternal drifting mists cleared a little. It revealed to them a surprising sight—a wall rearing invincibly upwards.

"Great Cat, we've come up beyond it!" Hilt shouted hoarsely. "We must be somewhere near where we first landed—"

"We sure are!" Cranby interrupted him, in a grim voice. "Take a look at that light to our left—somebody or something is near our ship! I seem to recall that Lanning said he'd have it found. He must have made Eveta give the order and—"

"Come on!" Hilt snapped, suddenly sighting the glimmer. Together they went forward at a run, finally discovered the light was streaming from the porthole of a small flyer similar to their own. Outside it, busy fastening an anchor cable to the ship's nose, was an insectile Venusian.

Hilt grinned bittely, made a long jump forward and seized the creature round its shell-like neck. Whirling him round he snatched his gun from the belt round the thing's equivalent of a waist. But just as he was about to fire it Cranby leapt lightly forward, deflected the blast into mid-air.

"What the hell's that for?" Hilt belowed.

"Take it easy, hothead!" Cranby whirled the cringing insect man to his feet. "Maybe this guy can help us somehow. 'We got to play every card well from now on, Hilt, and I figure this glorified centipede may be the ace of trumps. Don't forget that Lanning thinks we're dead. We've got the pull on him because of that.'"

"But this brute can't help us—"

"I'm trying it!" Cranby snapped. "I'm in this as much as you are. Keep your shirt on . . . Don't you remember Lanning saying that these people hated him? That he threw us overboard to make believe *he* had been killed? What's going to happen if the Venusians find out that Lanning is still much alive and that he's been hypnotizing their queen! Why, they'll tear the damned city apart to get at him! This guy here is going to have the truth, and like it. Sure he was sent to destroy, or rather take our ship—but we'll use him instead."

Hilt scratched his head. "Guess I was a bit too hasty at that. But say, suppose Lanning gets worried at this brute's absence and comes to look for him?"

"When he's supposed to be dead?" Cranby asked patiently.

Hilt's eyes brightened. "Hell—you think of everything. Of course he'll stick in the power house. All right, let's get inside our bus and see what we can do. We want action before the night ends if possible."

He motioned to the waiting creature. Obviously frightened it obeyed with alacrity and moved quickly through the airlock doorway, stood watching the two in the control room light with its queer, but none the less quite intelligent eyes. . . .

"WHAT'S your name?" Hilt demanded.

"Zaldar."

"I suppose you're one of the beings under the orders of Queen Eveta?"

"Yes; but—" The creature was clearly puzzled, went on slowly, "She does not do the things which we expected she would. We expected that she would make plans for controlling the swamp areas, ridding our world of the monsters which still roam it, perfecting science. All she does instead is give orders for the production of carbon. *Your* orders, I suppose?"

"That's where you're wrong, Zaldar," Hilt replied grimly. "We are Eveta's friends, your friends. You were tricked into believing we were imposters—you threw us to death, but we escaped. And now—now it's our turn! What we are trying to do is overthrow yet another being like ourselves who has no right on this world, who is trying to drive you all into slavery and overpower your queen."

"You—you mean there is still another like you in the city?" Zaldar demanded in amazement.

"Exactly that. Now listen very carefully, Zaldar . . . This being is controlling Eveta through hypnotism from the power house. The carbon you have been mining is for this usurper, to give

him wealth. The hypnotism explains why your queen has done none of the things you expected of her. We tried to beat the usurper and for answer he threw us in the mud-valley, turned the tables on us completely. He also made Eveta give you orders to destroy our ship, this very one we're in now. You can't need more proof than that!"

"My people must know of this," Zaldar muttered. "There are so many things I understand now. I must tell them—"

"Yeah, but just a minute," Cranby broke in. "We want no mistakes. Here is what you have to do. Queen Eveta must be left untouched. You will advise your people of the facts and then wait until your queen, of her own accord, enters the major power room to the north of the city. You know it, of course?"

The chitinous head nodded vigorously.

"Once you see her go in there and close the door—as she certainly will—radio the fact to us," Cranby went on. "Understand? Then we will come. We will take Queen Eveta out of danger before you attack the usurper. If you were to rush in on him with your queen still there he would slay her instantly. Then all would be lost. We must work as I have planned, and I rely on you to control your people to do likewise. You have authority of sorts, I suppose?"

"I am a guard," the creature answered. "You have my word . . . Wait for my signal."

"O.K. One last word, it's got to be done before sun-up. . . ."

Zaldar nodded and moved to the airlock, crossed rapidly to his own ship and climbed within it. In a moment or two it was rising swiftly upwards towards that monstrous wall.

"Well, the plan sounded O.K.; but just what do you figure on doing?" Hilt asked, pondering.

"Simple enough. You told me Eve stands on a sort of platform while Lanning gives her his hypnotic orders. Very well, you'll have to reach Eve from the skylight. Get it? Whip her up while I signal the Venusians. They'll rush in and—" Cranby's lean face broke into a slow grin. "I'm really sorry for Lanning. He's going to have the hell of a time."

Hilt smiled bitterly and sat back in his chair, switched on the radio in readiness.

"All set," he murmured. "And I think we could improve the shining hour by grabbing a bite to eat. Get busy; I'll watch the radio."

CHAPTER VIII

THREE hours passed, time in which Zaldar was presumably gathering together his fellow Venusians. In that time Hilt and Cranby chafed with impatience, examined their guns again and again—then at last the radio signal buzzed loudly. Instantly Hilt switched it on. The flutelike voice of Zaldar came through the speaker.

"I have told the others what to do," he said briefly. "They will attack the power house and destroy the usurper when you give the word. Queen Eveta has entered the power house and closed the door. I think she has been sleeping."

"Right!" Hilt snapped. "Be near the power house. When I give a double whistle charge for the doors and smash them open. We're coming now. . . ."

He switched off, swung round to the control board, sent the ship upwards from the plateau in a long curving line. It went over the wall like a rocket. Hilt drove steadily onwards, headed swiftly to the north, began to drop as the recog-

nizable bulk of the powerhouse loomed out of the distance. Swiftly and silently he dropped to the street outside it.

"I'll hand Eve down to you from the roof," he said briefly. "Be ready to grab her . . ."

He swung outside, clambered swiftly up the projections on the ship's exterior to the summit, vaulted lightly to the roof. He was not surprised to find the skylight shut considering his last experience. But below it was Eveta, Lanning facing her, his cold eyes boring into hers.

Hilt smiled twistedly and whipped out his gun, slammed the glass through in one tremendous impact.

"Hold it, Lanning!" he snapped, pointing the barrel straight at the astounded scientist. The reappearance of a man he had believed dead took the wind out of his sails. He raised his hands slowly, glared upwards.

With his boot heel Hilt smashed the remainder of the glass out, reached down his free arm and caught Eveta by the collar of her tough tunic. She turned a blank, startled face upwards as she was raised like a doll and dragged through the skylight.

But in doing that Hilt distracted his attention. Lanning made a flying leap, missed the girl's feet by inches. Instantly Hilt caught her round the waist and dragged her free, whirled her onto the roof, pushed her helplessly down it. Cranby's head popped over the roof edge, waiting to catch her.

Then a shot from below sent Hilt's gun spinning out of his hand. He dived for it, missed, tumbled headlong through the skylight and crashed onto the platform below.

"Smart guy, eh?" Lanning blazed, jumping towards him with gun leveled.

Hilt sprang up and forward in one move, jerked that gun arm upwards with not a second to spare. The bullet impacted against the metal roof. His

left came round with terrific force and landed under the scientist's jaw, sent him flying backwards.

"I owe you plenty, Lanning, and now you're going to get it!" Hilt panted. "Better fix yourself. Neither of us have got weapons now!"

THE scientist lay where he was for the moment, scowling. Then he got to his feet in sudden alarm as there came a pounding and rending against the powerhouse's enormous doors.

"Yeah—it's the ant men, after you," Hilt snapped, seeing his startled look.

"They'll—they'll tear me in pieces if they get in here!" Lanning shouted. "Listen, you've got to get me out! After all we are both earth men—there's a code of honor—"

"Honor?" Hilt raised an eyebrow as he clenched his fists. "Did you think of that when you enslaved Eveta for your own uses? Did you think of honor when you planned to master two worlds by superior science? And what about when you threw Cranby and me into the mud . . . ? You, rotten, lying skunk!"

Hilt's words finished in a roar as he hurled himself forward.

Adroitly, Lanning twisted himself sideways, evading the rush. He ran for his life to the metal ladder leading to the first engine balcony. With slipping feet he clambered up it, glanced round as the powerhouse doors burst open to vomit forth a multitude of shouting, struggling antmen.

Like a shot Hilt dove for the ladder, raced up it, chased Lanning along the broad spiralway, up another flight of steps to the second balcony. Below them the engines of the place roared with swelling power. Antmen teemed along the gangways.

In an extrapowerful dive Hilt caught up, swung Lanning round and sent him reeling with one blow of his tremendous

fist. Desperate, the scientist jumped up and lashed out with a short arm jab, missed Hilt's face by inches. His reward was a slam under the jaw that lifted him off his feet, hurled him backwards along the narrow aisleway.

Confusion and pandemonium raged from below. The antmen had seen him now, were racing towards him in a vengeful horde. He reeled to his feet, lurched to the attack once more. He was hurled right and left by those piston fists, reeled drunkenly against the balcony rail, his face blood smeared and bruised.

"Had enough?" Hilt panted, clutching him. "Listen, I'll try and save you for earthly justice if you'll—"

He broke off perforce as Lanning suddenly surged back to life, brought up his knee and drove it straight into Hilt's stomach. Winded, anguished, Hilt staggered backwards and collapsed on the floor. The toe of Lanning's boot struck him brutally in the jaw.

He lay agonized, watching the scientist flying along the gangway. With vast effort he mastered his pain, clawed his way to his feet. His face set into a ruthless mask. He waved back the antmen as they surged towards him. Zalदार, in the forefront, called a halt. Slowly Hilt moved along, his eyes watching that figure. By degrees his pain abated. . . . He walked faster, he ran, seized Lanning at the end of the gangway.

There was no mercy in the terrific punch he slammed into the scientist's face. Time and again he pounded him, rained blows on his face, his chest, hurled him like a sack of coals along the gangway. Hands outspread like claws Lanning used the rail to spring himself forward again. Hilt anticipated it, drove his right arm up with a force that lifted Lanning clean off his feet. Head at an acute angle he whizzed backwards, caught the rail in

the small of the back and overbalanced.

A SECOND later there was a noticeable brief reduction in the roar of the power engines; then it returned to normal. Quivering, sweat drenched, Hilt moved to the balcony and stared over. He turned away, set faced, at the vision of a charred wreck on one of the main power feed wires. Lanning had absorbed half the voltage of the powerhouse through his body and, contacting a machine as well, had earthed it. . . .

Zalदार and his antmen came forward slowly, stood looking down on the thing that had been Lanning. He spoke disappointedly.

"A pity the usurper eluded us, Earthman—but at least you have destroyed him, and for that we are grateful. Now we must have our queen back. . . ."

Hilt swung to him. This was a contingency he had not reckoned with. His eyes passed over the hordes packing the gangways.

"Yes—of course," he muttered. "I'll fetch her."

"We will come with you," Zalदार said, with a certain adamancy.

As he walked along and descended the stair flights Hilt thought swiftly. Naturally the people wanted their queen back, but— That would put things pretty much the same as before. There was one chance, and one only . . . his legs!

On the ground floor he still walked casually; then suddenly he spurted into a fiendish run, heading for the door at frantic speed. As he whirled outside he yelled out.

"Make way for Hilt! I'm coming, Cran! We've got to move! Quick!"

Like a whirlwind he tore down through the surging masses of antmen outside. Surprised at his action they made way for him. Fighting and struggling he pounded to the airlock open-

ing, plunged through it. Swinging round he slammed the valve clean in Zaladar's face as he came racing up.

"Up! Up before they get us!" Hilt yelled.

Without a word Cranby threw in the engine switches. Lightly as a feather the ship hurtled into the upper reaches, stopped for a while in the safety of the eternal clouds.

"Whew! Done it!" Hilt mopped his face, briefly recounted his experiences. Then he glanced at Eveta sitting in the spare seat. "O.K. now?" he murmured gently.

She nodded promptly. "Yes, but—Hilt, what's been happening? The last thing I remember was going under anaesthetic way back on the earth, in Valordom. Now we're on Venus. Just what—"

"Tell you as we go along, Eve. . . . We only just got out in time," Hilt went on, glancing at Cranby. "Those devils wanted Eve back. I staked everything on a hundred yard sprint. And now. . . ."

He shrugged and his face went a shade grimmer.

"Valordom!" he muttered.

IT WAS a week later when the space machine finished its journey across the gulf and landed back on that self same roof in Valordom. The four scientists were there to meet it, stood gravely looking on as the three stepped through the airlock.

Without a word being spoken they were conducted through the rambling reaches of the great building to the Master's own enormous residence. Here a meal had been laid with faultless perfection. Silently he motioned to the vacant places, sat down with his three comrades on either side of him.

At last he broke his long silence, his voice undeniably sincere.

"Hilton Read, you are a man of hon-

or, endurance, and above all, bravery."

HILT shrugged as he voraciously glanced across at Eveta.

"Not much honor about it," he answered shortly. "I swore I'd get Eve and wipe out Lanning—mainly for personal reasons—and I did it. I told you before I only brought Eve back into your—er—clutches because there's no way to escape you. Don't make me into a hero. . . ."

"My colleagues and I took full notice of all you did on Venus," the Master went on. "The X-ray telescope penetrated the cloudbanks, revealed your every action to us. . . . Such men as you—and Cranby Doyle here—are very rare!"

"So what?" Cranby asked, chewing languidly.

For the first time the Master smiled.

"When I stole Eveta as the one surviving link in the Venusian chain I did not realize that a man of another world—this world—could have all the necessary attributes to make him equal with her. I realize now that a blood tie is not entirely necessary for control of a planet. . . . You have shown yourself capable of working side by side with your wife, Hilton Read, and I see no reason why Doyle cannot work with you."

"Just what are you getting at?" Hilt asked quietly, lowering his knife and fork. "Are you suggesting that we all go back to that hell-fired planet? If so, think again. I wouldn't go through that experience again for anything you could name. . . ."

"Listen to me! I think you are intelligent enough to make a bargain with me. At the outset of your experiences you wanted to get the secret of *valsix* metal in order to make your country safe from any attack, did you not?"

"Right enough."

"Suppose that we did away with our

secrecy here, admitted our presence to the world, and conferred upon it whatever benefits our advanced science can give? Suppose, without interfering with any one form of government, we kept a scientific eye on the world, kept world power balanced so that war and aggression would be impossible. . . . Now, just how much does that appeal to you?"

Hilt pondered for a long time, glanced over to Cranby and the girl again. Their expressions reflected merely his own silent wonderment.

"Well, of course, it's a terrific idea," he admitted finally. "With your knowledge and radio control, and space travel too, you'd make the world worth living in. But just what is the price?"

"Our own world of Venus still needs a ruler," the Master said quietly. "In fact not one but two—even three. Rulers who have strength, humanity, and youth. You three have those qualities. Back of it all we can be in control, ready at any time to give advice. . . . There will be no hypnosis; no anything. I am prepared to trust the three of you with the task of making that distant world into a worthwhile place. . . . You will be instructed how to use the machines; you will clean up the planet's prehistoric portions; you will open up an interplanetary empire!

"You will be the queen and king of Venus, with a trustworthy aide in Cranby Doyle. Always together, pioneer-

ing, until— When you have moulded a first class planet I will hand over the secret of space travel to Earthlings. Trade between worlds will begin. . . . Do you not understand? You can found an empire in the stars! You started the work on Venus; why not finish it?"

"The idea's so mighty I hardly know how to take it in," Hilt muttered. "After all, it means remoulding the destiny of a planet. . . ."

"And it means the beginning of the interplanetary age," Eveta said quietly. "I'm ready to do it, Hilt. . . . After all, Venus is my natural home."

"Well, it's O.K. by me," Cranby grinned. "More interesting than skipping round the earth breaking records, anyway. Count me in."

"All right," Hilt said slowly, his jaw squaring. "We'll do it, Master—but I make one condition. You've got to make Eveta's brain normal again so she can't be hypnotized with such consummate ease. You see, those antmen may try something when we get back. For that reason we all want control of our own minds."

"Of course," the scientist smiled. He looked around at the three, then at his colleagues. Finally he filled the seven glasses by his elbow with light wine.

"Suppose, a toast?" he exclaimed. "A toast to the potential empire—the empire of the stars. . . ."

THE END

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I did—Actually and literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, among many and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson Dept. 9, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 9, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

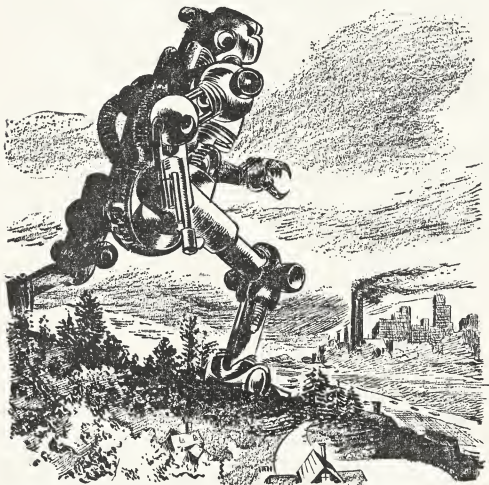
MIND-JOLTING NOVELETTE OF A ROBOT TO END ALL ROBOTS!

A DICTATOR FOR ALL TIME

by **RAYMOND Z. GALLUN**

Author of "The Time Retarder," etc.

The culmination of all scientific progress, was The Entity, with an inconceivably vast and complicated body comprising every element and compound that could exist, with a brain weighing well over a thousand tons!



What mindless plan would next occupy his colossal intellect?

NOT so long ago, birth had occurred. Maybe a half-billion years. Two stars had swept close; matter was torn from their masses in a brief interlude of unimaginable glory. Then those stars had gone on, like dogs retreating from a fight, to

dwindle to pinpoints in opposite distances of space.

But around both, where there had been only emptiness before, tattered streamers had swung, coalescing gradually to form the crude, fiery shapes of primitive worlds.

To one of these new solar systems came the Entity, who was as old as many of the suns of the void. He was the culmination of the scientific progress of a race now long since dead. His spherical metal shell, four miles in diameter, glistened with opalescent lights in the rays of the young solar orb. Yet he was not altogether a machine. Almost every element and compound that could exist, could be found somewhere in his vast, unimaginably complicated form. Steel, hard and shining and lifeless, wrought into the most solid and the most fragile of mechanisms, was there to obey the will of a mass of brain tissue, which, by standards with which we are acquainted, would have weighed perhaps a thousand tons.

What did that colossal intellect think of, as flaming jets of broken atoms checked the tremendous interstellar speed of the shell that shielded it? No man could ever have followed those thoughts in detail, of course.

THE hot jets faded out, and the sphere, swinging in a planetary orbit now, seemed to brood. But there was wonder in the godlike soul it concealed. And there was a deep, tense urge to seek out truth to its ultimate perfection. The Entity's brain was free from the necessity for routine work to maintain itself. In its stupendous, abstract researches, the consumption of time was no object, for the Entity was eternal.

He looked upon this new solar system with eyes not so very different from our own, except that their lenses and retinas were of quartz and metal and sensitive compounds. But those eyes could accomplish their purpose more effectively than eyes of living protoplasm.

Through them this strange wanderer of stupendous powers, saw the young planets, all but the smallest of which

were still nebulous with expanded vapors, and encircling clouds of unsettled cosmic dust.

And in the brain of the Entity throbbed the knowledge that some of these worlds would one day produce creatures that would think and hope and dream, and feel the touch of ambition.

That was the future. In the churning bulks of those planets were the atoms that would sometime form the bodies, the clothing, the machines, and everything material that would belong to the lives of those creatures. But now everything was in a state of flux—of seeming chaos.

Those cloudy planets, made oblate and tattered by the centrifugal force of their swift spinning, looked like the children of chaos. But the Entity knew that in all the universe there is no such thing as disorder. His experience had proved our human theory that all that happens moves in a fixed groove of circumstance. He had found that the natural law of cause and effect leaves no room for chance, and binds the future in a mold as rigid and final as that of the past. Today and yesterday the causes which will build the events of tomorrow, down to their last minute detail, exist and have existed. And if those causes can all be found and properly interpreted, the picture of things to come grows clear.

But this task is staggering in its immensity. Beyond the mathematical prediction of eclipses, and the far more tentative prediction of the weather, of political trends and so forth, man can not attempt it; for he has neither the capacity to find all of the causes, nor the knowledge and the mental power to fit them together.

The Entity, however, was not nearly so handicapped, though he too had his limitations. He viewed each world carefully, choosing the third in order

from the sun as the best subject for study, since experience told him that its size, and the quality and strength of the solar illumination it received, made it the best suited for the development of intelligent life.

"I shall try," he thought. "I shall try to predict the history of this planet. Then I shall wait and see how right I am—or how wrong!"

The great sphere that was his body jetted fire, and he shot closer to the whirling, mass of his subject. It had a satellite, which, because of its much lesser size, had already cooled to form a globe with a semi-solid crust, whose surface was blotched with great seas of lava, that glowed a dull, slumberous red through the murky atmosphere of volcanic gas.

Around the third world the Entity swung, assuming the path of a tiny, second moon. Moving regularly now in his steady orbit, he seemed to ponder.

HE was beginning, now, to collect the local data which must form the major part of the information he required. He must learn the paths and the velocity of every minute unit of matter in all the tremendous bulk of that forming planet.

To accomplish this bewildering task, the Entity had only radiation to depend on. That planet, hot and new, emitted light and heat waves of its own, which, however, just as in the science of the spectroscope, with which we are acquainted, could provide him with a limited knowledge of the condition of the elements and substances from which they originated. And there were finer waves, of which we know nothing, thrown off by the atoms and molecules, and the free electrons, protons, and neutrons themselves. These waves, streaming out into the void, the Entity could detect, by means of the marvelous instruments that were part of him.

Even so, the stupendous research required more than ten thousand years to complete. For those delicate waves, some of them surging up from the materials at the very core of the third world, had to be sorted and analyzed perfectly, in order that they might yield the exact information that was needed.

The job would have been finished, as far as information was concerned, had it not been for the fact that the Entity had to take into consideration factors outside of his subject itself. That planet had a satellite, whose gravity and whose presence introduced disturbing circumstances. Then there was the sun, and the other sister worlds. All had to be examined almost to the final limit. There were ways, even, for a meteor, small as a grain of dust, to spoil the whole prospect of accurate prediction. So every cubic mile of the solar system had to be investigated. Not even the tiny gravity of the Entity himself, could be neglected.

Nor was the needed data complete here. For there were the stars, emitting rays which might somewhere hold the unknown quantity that would disrupt all his calculations. But through the countless eons of his existence, the Entity had journeyed far indeed, and had probed the structure of almost every flaming sun within a radius of a hundred light years. He knew their movements, their size, their exact composition, and hence their probable future history.

So, satisfied that he had done his best, he proceeded at last with his major task. In his brain—a thousand tons of living grey matter—he began to build a vision that was like an analogy of the universe, but which had its focus on this third world of fire and gas and seeming chaos.

To maintain that titanic vision, and to carry its movement on through time, the Entity had to judge just how nat-

ural law would work, in connection with every scrap of the data he had collected. Gaseous atoms speeding, colliding. Gravity pulling at them. Centrifugal force counteracting some of the gravity. Variations of heat, differences of pressure, and myriad other factors. All these things had to be considered with perfect exactness. Cause—effect. If you missed no cause, and misjudged no effect, you were able to tell just what would happen next and next and next—in steps.

It was all like a colossal puzzle, or like a giant mental game of numbers that only a giant mind could ever have attempted. The intellect of the Entity was filled with the fearful strain of concentration. He took no note of his surroundings now. He only floated there in space, around the world whose future he wished to see, all his attention absorbed in the building of his dream...

COSMIC dust settling. Seething liquids cooling. Continents forming. Superheated water vapor condensing to form oceans. Life. Animalculae, algae, and bacteria, at first. Then higher forms. Fish. Reptiles. Trees, grass, and flowers. Mammals.

The Entity must have gone through a millenium of thought before he saw man—Homo Sapiens—developed from the lesser races. . . . Pyramids being built in Egypt. Rome conquering. The Dark Ages and the rise of science. . . . This planet was Terra, or the Earth, home of humankind.

Presently the Entity caught the first strain of that people's urge to go beyond prescribed bounds and explore space. Goddard, Opel, and finally, in a time called 1970 A. D., Laurelle Cranston and Fred Chambers, the latter destined to be the first man to reach the Moon. Unless, of course, there was some error in the stupendous calculations on which the vision of the future

was constructed.

And beyond the time of Fred Chambers' adventure, in 1981, lay war clouds which seemed to spell the end, not only for the civilization of this planet, but for the people who had built it.

Did the Entity feel regret at this discovery? Perhaps. And in that regret of his he touched a new cause in the chain of causes affecting the future. Apparently so free in his own decisions, the Entity knew that even he was swayed absolutely by circumstance, just as are men, and just as are blades of grass, blown by the wind. Any brain, no matter how huge and fine, still is mastered by its own background and nature, born out of the unalterable past, and by external stimuli. There is no such thing as whim. No decision that any mind can make is free from the absolute control of causes lying beyond that mind itself. In men there is anger, fear, strong will or lack of it; intelligence and knowledge or stupidity and ignorance. Even the Entity's vast foresight was but a complication of this truth—an intricate cause which must be considered carefully in predicting things to come.

Undoubtedly the Entity had at his command, means to prevent that human war of destruction. But in the end, here, he could make only one choice. Looking ahead, analyzing himself and the circumstances that would influence him, he knew—if his calculations were not in error—that, though in a minor way he would touch human history, he would not touch the broad causes of that final conflict. Regret he might feel at man's self-destruction; but that regret would be overbalanced by other things. Frequently, during his far-flung wanderings, he had been the cause that had prevented the descent of catastrophe upon small, mortal beings. That repetition was a cause in itself, that would prompt him to act dif-

ferently on this occasion, for variety, and to maintain clinical interest in the more natural progress of events.

But the Entity did not try to suppress the glow of kinship he felt for Laurelle Cranston, the girl aviator and experimenter, and for Fred Chambers, whose reckless grin matched the reckless dream in his eyes.

THAT great, godlike visitor, building his huge, mathematical vision, saw those two in his thoughts. He pictured them a year before Fred Chambers' destined leap into space. Their hands stained with grease and chemicals, they toiled at a workbench in a shack at the edge of a rocket experiment field near Buffalo, New York. On the workbench a model of their space ship was taking form.

The girl was pretty. Even her soiled smock could not change that fact. Pensively, now, she fussed with a small pliers. Then she turned smoke-grey eyes toward her companion.

"I'm wondering, again, Fritz," she said, her voice husky. "I'm wondering just how things are going to turn out for us. Are we chasing a futile rainbow? Have we sunk every cent we've got in this Moon project, only to have it fail? Just think, Fritz—in a couple of months we could both be dead! I'd hate to think of you being dead, Fritz—smashed, or torn to bits in explosion—when you're so full of hope and enthusiasm now! There's such a maddening contrast between a smile and a body that's all still and crushed!"

Undaunted by the girl's gruesome thought, Fred Chambers chuckled gayly. "Hush up, wet blanket!" he ordered, giving her a playful shove with a big grease-blackened palm. "We'll make out all right. Wait and see!" He paused, before he continued in a more sober tone: "Only, Laurelle, it really would help if we could know before-

hand, wouldn't it? Gosh. . . ."

Thus the Entity contacted the personalities of two who could not be born, at least in a normal manner, until slow-marching time bridged a gulf that to humans was inconceivable. And in their courage, and their eagerness to batter down the walls of the unknown, he found that in a small way they were like himself. The vague wonder they had expressed at the hidden future, intrigued him, setting up stimuli in his colossal brain. Thus, in the involved processes of his thinking, a decision was formed—a decision the fabric of which he had seen before, in his analysis of things to come. This trend of his actions would influence the history of Earth, of course, but only in detail. With or without its inevitable presence, the war of finality still would come.

"I will make this man, Fred Chambers, live—now," he thought. "Then I shall wait—"

Fred Chambers awoke in a vague, gloomy place of curved walls and glittering arms. He did not know that he was a synthetic duplicate of a human being of the probable future.

The last thing he remembered was the surging thrust of the lunar takeoff. It had stunned him. Before that, from the heavily glazed port of his little control room, he had seen a vast crowd, withdrawing from the circle of danger around his space ship, and waving to him in mingled enthusiasm, worship, and concern. Laurelle, whom he loved, had kissed him good-bye. . . .

But this was not the interior of his rocket. Instead of being a narrow, padded compartment, it was a huge, shadowy room, its ceiling braced by massive piers. Machines and apparatus of an unguessable nature, were grouped about its floor, and in clusters from the walls and roof, metal tentacles dangled, as if to control the machines,

and to do intricate laboratory work.

FRED discovered that he was wearing the white coverall costume that he had donned just before his leap into space. Still pinned to his shoulder was the tiny carved dog that Laurelle had given him for luck. He did not know that both his clothing and the charm, like himself, were duplicates, constructed by intricate atomic chemistry, according to the scheme of the yet unravelled future.

Why he was in this cavernous lair of unguessable magic, he could not imagine. He called out: "Hello!" self-consciously, and the echo came back in a soft, vaulted whisper: "Hello!"

And then, in a sonorous voice that was not an echo: "Peace, Little One. For now, you are safe. But you are not quite what you believe yourself to be. I am the Entity, and this laboratory is within my—body. I have made you, here, toying with the innermost secrets of life. Laurelle Cranston does not yet exist. It is even possible that she shall never exist—that both of you, and all your race, are only errors in my calculations, and can never come out of the time stream."

In that heavy, vibrant voice, which seemed to originate from some mechanism in the walls, Fred Chambers sensed the presence of something that had reached almost the ultimate of scientific and mental progress. Fred ran his fingers through his shock of dark hair in a gesture of awe and confusion.

"I don't get it," he grumbled in dazed turbulence. "Calculations? Time stream?"

So the Entity spoke again, gently, and in finer detail, presenting in human language an outline of his activities, and explaining the process—the ordered sequence—by which the events of history moved in an unalterable groove.

And Fred listened in awe to those godlike tones, feeling in them the vast, ordered truth of the universe.

"I know the theory," he said at last. "And I understand it. Nothing happens without cause. I can even see why I am here now. In a way you are responsible. But no, that is not true, for you are not responsible for your own existence. You are only a link in a chain of causes which began long before your time."

"Precisely," the voice of the Entity returned.

Then, as Fred watched, the wall of the room became transparent, as the atoms in it were rearranged by a subtle flow of energy. In a broad band around him Fred saw the inky sky of space. In it the primal sun blazed. Near and huge was the flattened globe of the Earth, orange fire shining through its clouded, tattered atmosphere. Farther away was the moon, a blotched coal glowing redly through the film of its cooling ashes, and through the wisps of poisonous gases that lingered around it, temporarily restrained from leakage into space by the low lunar gravity.

The era of the formation of lunar craters was just beginning. The "seas" of the moon, were still stupendous pools of red-hot lava. Not until the lunar crust had hardened more, presenting greater resistance to the superheated stuff of the moon's heart, could true volcanic activity reach its peak.

THE view of the void, presented to Fred Chambers, was a thing of awesome beauty, which any astronomer would have given his life to see. Yet, fascinated though he was, Fred found a wild panic throbbing in his pulses. That panic was the product of a sense of distance from his own time. A billion and a half years at least!

"But—what do you expect to do with me?" he questioned tensely.

The answer he received was prompt. "As far as I can tell," said the Entity, "that other Fred Chambers shall be the first individual of your kind to make a real journey between worlds. He shall land on the moon. So I have made you in his exact image, physically, mentally, and emotionally, to use as a means of checking my calculations. I shall build you a place of refuge on the lunar surface. There you shall sleep through the eons. And in 1970 A. D., if my work has not been along a faulty path, the man of whom you are a double shall come, and you shall meet him. If he is exactly like you, I shall know that my predictions, at least to 1970, are accurate. But of course no one may come at all. Or the first moon voyager may not arrive at the moment that I expect, and he may be different entirely from yourself, and hideous to your way of thinking."

"And if—my other self appears on schedule, what then?" Fred demanded.

The sonorous voice droned once more: "The normally born Fred Chambers is doomed. In my mind I have seen the nozzles of his rocket burn out just as he is landing. His supplies of air, food, and water, are very limited. So, he dies on the moon. You die with him. But it does not matter so much, for in 1981 the great conflict that blots out your people."

"The end, then?" Fred muttered dully. "A lot of useless efforts?"

He considered for a long moment, his lips going tense in that Cyclopean semi-darkness, as he tried to grasp all the angles of the fantastic situation in which he found himself. He thought of Laurelle, and of the fun they'd had together. And he thought of a thousand other things—friends, vivid memories of gay, happy moments—synthetic memories!

"It isn't fair!" he shouted suddenly, not knowing quite why he did so.

But there was no chance for him to

speak or think further. Clouds of yellow vapor hissed from vents in the wall, which had resumed its capacity. He struggled to avoid them, stumbling over the maze of cables that crisscrossed the floor. But there was no place for him to go. His knees buckled, and he slumped down.

Of what followed, he knew nothing. He was not aware of the huge spaceship-like thing that held him prisoner, lowering itself gradually through the sulphurous lunar atmosphere. On a narrow ridge at the rim of a still molten lunar "sea," the burnished sphere that was the form of the Entity, found a resting place. Presently a door opened in its side, and a kind of gangplank was let down. Robots, black and awesome, filed out of the globe that mastered them. They carried tools, and bars and plates of the finest and most enduring of metals.

FOR many hours they toiled with swift efficiency, building a small, hollow pyramid, stout enough to endure the jolts of violent lunar quakes, and the inevitable burying beneath tons of volcanic scoria. Then, when the sun had set, and the stars burned through the yellow murk, mingling their glow with the ruddy reflection from the neighboring sea of molten rock, they carried a kind of casket into the tomb they had constructed. Rigidly it was bolted into place. Various food supplies were sealed in the lockers around the walls, to await the awakening of the sleeper. Intricate clocks were set, which, at the proper moment, would activate the mechanism for revival, and the disintegrator apparatus that would clear the volcanic debris away.

When the work was completed, the faithful left the refuge, and closed the massive, airtight door behind them. Like demons in the lurid gloom, they filed back into the sphere of the Entity.

The latter's burnished form lifted into space, and began to dwindle away against the stars. Looking into the future—into human mathematics of space travel—the Entity had judged just where the man-guided rocket should land. And he had chosen the site for the refuge of the synthetic Fred Chambers, so that it would be near. But the eons must pass before the test that he had planned could mature; and those eons could be used to advantage in making a more complete exploration of the universe.

For the second time during his bizarre adventure of the ages, Fred Chambers regained his sense. The casket lid was open, raised by a lever mechanism. There was a pungent smell in the air—the odor of the stimulating vapors that had broken his sleep of suspended animation.

Stiffly, as if he were a mummy, miraculously aroused from the dead, he clambered out of the casket. A beam of brilliant sunshine, slanting from a massive window in the wall, made a bright circle on the floor. The stillness was the stillness of a world that had perished.

Fred Chambers approached the window, and peered beyond it. The metal pyramid that had been his tomb, stood in a shallow pit, for the disintegrator tubes arranged in a ring around it, had blasted away the scoria that had buried it. Near loomed the serrations of the ridge, and beyond was the smooth expanse of the now-cold lunar "sea." To right and left, where the ridge curved, craters reared like the walls of the deserted cities of Titans. Sullen and dead and brooding, this at least was the moon that Fred Chambers knew from his other life.

He searched the black, airless sky. Yes, there too was the familiar Earth, the continents vaguely defined through the murk of its atmosphere.

In spite of everything, Fred Chambers was somewhat reassured. The Entity had been right in the broader aspects of his colossal predictions, at least. Through ancient and godlike wisdom had said that he would perish here, with his double, the youth found comfort in the knowledge that he was living now in his own time, with what was, or at least should be, his native world, within view.

FRED kept his gaze fixed hopefully on the Earth, trying to imagine what it would be like to be one of two twins, identical in every phase of background and personality. When that other Fred Chambers arrived, he would be startled to find a man, just like himself, already here! They would talk, and they would grin ruefully at each other. They would mention Laurelle Cranston, who had been the darling of both. They would explore the lunar crust until their supplies gave out. Both would have that same reckless courage, that would discount much of the tension of waiting for death. There was every reason to suppose that their comradeship would be real fun!

So Fred Chambers attempted a sketchy prediction of the future, using, in his far feeble human way, the same means which the Entity had employed in his gigantic forecast.

So the young man waited for a strange meeting. But the hours went by without the anticipated development. There was no streak of flame in the sky, heralding the approach of a rocket from Earth. Even the Entity was nowhere to be seen.

Fred began to grow uneasy. Something, somewhere, somehow, was wrong; for the Entity must have timed his—Fred's—awakening so that it would coincide quite closely with the arrival of the space craft that was scheduled to bring that other Fred.

Ten hours, eleven hours, twelve hours, a full terrestrial day, slipped by; still there was nothing to gratify his hopes for companionship.

Fred ate from the hermetically sealed rations in the lockers around him. There were queer cakes of protein gelatin, and other strange delicacies, not so very different really from the foods he had known at home. The food supply looked plentiful enough; but still there was the maddening certainty that it could not last for more than a few weeks.

Fred slept curled up on the floor. He awoke, ate, watched, and slept again. But at last the tension of waiting became a torture within him. He searched his refuge feverishly. Thus, in a closet-like compartment, he found a space suit. It was identical to the space suit he remembered from the lunar journey of his synthetic past. There was even the engraved name-plate of its manufacturer, Haines and Mendel, at the crown of its oxygen helmet.

Young Chambers donned the armor. Like a man trying to escape from a mausoleum, he tugged at the massive bolt of the airtight door that sealed his refuge. As the great valve opened the confined atmosphere puffed out with a thin, fading sigh; but Fred didn't mind the waste especially. A little less oxygen that could come from the hidden apparatus that provided his strange, metal pyramid with breathable air. A little less time to wait for the release of death. That was the way he was beginning to think and feel now. Aloneness. Mental depression. The Entity had been wrong somewhere. Death. Alone . . .

And so Fred Chambers rushed out into the nerve-grating bleakness of the moon. But a flash of common sense made him close the door of his refuge behind him. It was sanity to be frugal—to prevent an unnecessary leakage of his precious air.

STARS—an infinite host of stars—staring like little eyes, like countless tiny nail-heads of purest iridium, driven into a sky that was like a picture of drab, endless infinity. Mountains and crater walls and masses of hardened lava, the crests of each touched by the brilliance of the naked sun, until they glared almost like bits of lime held in an incandescent flame. Shadows, black as the entrails of a dragon, some of them as ancient as the rocks, for there were deep valleys into which the solar rays never penetrated.

Here on this corpse world, Fred Chambers first tried to proceed with a sane exploration, wandering through the jagged passes between the twisted bulks of a topography that had congealed in the cold of death soon after its creation. Now and then he returned to his pyramid to sleep and to take nourishment. But though he was cool and courageous, all that was horrible about the situation in which he found himself, soon began to get him, until there were mad lights glinting feverishly in his eyes, and a mad look of strain in the hollows of his cheeks.

Silence, except for the soft rustle of pulses beating. The darkness of long night, suggesting inevitably that this region of stark cold, and moveless Gargantuan glory was no place for a creature of living protoplasm ever to intrude. Tumbling thoughts, associated with memory—synthetic memory! Green fields. Blue sky. Laurelle. . . . Ghosts, that might have been real. . . . And somewhere the real Entity, who had misjudged somehow in his gigantic forecast of the inexorable future. . . .

And so, as his supplies dwindled, Fred Chambers wished more and more for the release of death. Until, at the end of the fourth week, there came a sign. In the sky to the east, over the undulating flatness of the lunar "sea," there was the incandescent streamer of

a space ship landing. Exploding titanite!

Fifty miles away, at least, the rocket came to rest. But Fred, thin and gaunt and wild now, would have bounded toward it, had the distance been a million miles. His action was, in a way, like that of a man falling into a pit, grasping at a feather in the air.

In spite of the low gravity, it was hours before he arrived at his destination. Panting, swaying drunkenly, he stood and stared for a full minute at the flame-scored craft. It was quite unlike that rocket of his that he remembered. His had been a slender, pointed cylinder, while this craft, tipped on its side, and half buried in the dust, was shaped more like the top of a mushroom. The metal, in the fierce glory of the sunshine, reflected a greenish lustre, which hinted at weird possibilities. This was an alloy which Fred Chambers had never seen before. It brought to him a feeling of certainty that whatever creatures were inside the rocket, could not be remotely human. In his depressed state of mind, Fred could not be optimistic. He could not think that man had ever come into being on Earth. No, it would not even be called Earth, but something else, buzzing or throbbing out of alien vocal organs, that would be part of unimaginable forms.

SUCH was his state of mind that he did not notice the familiar curve of the handles of the space craft's airlock as he clutched them. In peculiar contrast to his horror, his wariness was in abeyance. He wanted to see the unknown as soon as possible. At least there would be relief in discovery. There might be, even, companionship of a sort, with a being or beings of a world that should be Earth, but was not. The Entity's error. Somewhere a cause, vital in building the picture of the future, had been missed. History

had taken another path in time.

It was not until Fred had passed through the airlock of the space ship, that a vague surprise began to come over him. The little room, with its padded walls, and its burnished dials and lever handles, looked Earthly, though there was evidence of much scientific improvement.

The shape, huddled on the floor, was not a duplicate of himself; but neither was it the shape of something squeezed out of an utterly unfamiliar region of time.

A white coverall costume. A lock of curly yellow hair peeping out from beneath a tight fitting crash-helmet. A wicked bruise on a pale forehead. This was a girl! This was—Laurelle Cranston!

How—how could it be? Fred hardly questioned now. His sole, instinctive concern was to revive Laurelle. There was brandy in the medicine chest built into the wall. To free his hands for quick action, Fred removed his clumsy space suit.

Presently Laurelle had opened her eyes, wonderingly. Then, when she saw who was with her, she gave a short, sharp gasp.

"Fritz!" she breathed raggedly. "Now I know that I've been killed—too!"

"No, you're wrong!" Fred protested. "I'm alive, Laurelle! I'm—" For a moment he stammered. Then the words came tumbling out, explaining his weird adventure, the strange miracle that had given him being, and the concept of the fixed finality of the future.

The girl listened, her eyes wide and half-believing.

"That night, Fritz," she said at last. "It was in July, 1968. Two years ago, since it's almost July, 1970, now. We were just sitting in the hut at the test field, talking, when Darnell came in, and told us about the nova in Cassiopeia.

Mount Wilson Observatory had sighted it, and had radioed the information through. Well, you and I went out to see the nova, but it excited us quite a lot. Afterwards we went for a drive. We wouldn't have done so if it hadn't been for the nova. Excitement made you reckless, Fritz. There was a collision, and you were killed. But I was just hurt a little. The Rocket Club managed to raise a big endowment as a memorial to you. So there was a lot of money for further tests. This rocket of mine is considerably better than yours would have been. After we do some exploring, it'll take us back to Earth—"

She stopped speaking, and as she arose to her feet, an odd look of confusion came to her face.

"For a moment," she said huskily, "the idea came to me that you weren't really Fritz, considering how you were made. But no, you are Fritz—reborn."

FRED laughed a shaky laugh of awe. "Yes, Laurelle," he returned. "Except for certain memories, which my double didn't live long enough to have, we are the same. That day we talked of the future, wondering how things would turn out for us. The building of that rocket of mine. But you don't remember. Because of the nova, those events didn't happen—"

Fred Chambers was smiling with a vast relief and thankfulness. A flaw in a stupendous forecast—a nova. A tiny gleam of light in the tremendous distance. The Entity had doubtless predicted accurately the appearance of many other novae. But where the abysmal distance beyond Cassiopia was concerned, his data had been incomplete. Yet Fred had every reason to be glad for the error, for it had given him new life.

For several moments he was bewildered. Stars. Men. Blades of grass waving in the wind. All were the prod-

ucts of cause, and were mastered by cause. Even the Entity. Where was the Entity now?

Fred did not have to wonder long, for then the whole rocket began to vibrate. And the vibration, produced perhaps by a modulated force in space, akin to gravity or magnetism, produced the sonorous tones of a godlike voice, saying:

"All is well, now, Little Ones. We have seen the nova—the lost factor. It is the means of revealing a brighter phase in the history of all your kind. Once there was danger that your race would destroy itself in war. But when the nova gleamed, a dictator turned his head, felt the bigness of things, and thought a different thought. Other humans stopped to look at the minute miracle of the sky, and their routines were shifted, a little. They did different things than they would have, otherwise. And in fifty years a great leader shall be born, out of a chain of circumstances different from those I once saw. That is all, Little Ones. I go!"

Looking from a tiny window of the rocket's cabin, Laurelle and Fred saw a great circular shadow sweep across the lunar "sea." And above, in the sunshine, was a huge globe, speeding away into the interstellar distances.

Out of the picture of the fading form, out of the pattern of stars and moon-scape and suspended, murky Earth, these two human watchers captured a small bit of the understanding of time, of space, of planets, of living minds, and of shifting, speeding atoms. The future built from the past. Tremendous in its broader aspects, infinitely fine in its detail, the universe was the one perfect machine.

"The Entity," Laurelle whispered absently. "In the end our people may produce a being such as he. Does he see that time? Or in the future are there other—lost factors?"

THE THOUGHT-WORLD MONSTERS

by RICHARD O. LEWIS

Author of "The Unknown," etc.

Scientific experiments didn't interest Speed Howell, and he especially didn't care about a trip to the thought-world!



Why were the monsters bent only on attacking Ruth and him?

"AND a few other things!" said Pug-Pan, the city editor. "Stay away from beer taverns! Don't miff this assignment! And, for your own worthless sake, stop playing detective!"

"I would have had that foreign agent," said Speed Howell. "if three gentlemen hadn't thrown me down stairs."

"They should have thrown you out of the window," said Pug-Pan, "as a personal favor to me. Now get going! And if you slip up on this assignment. . . ." His cheeks puffed out and his face went black. ". . . so help me you're fired!"

"Nutts!" said Speed, and slammed the door on his way out.

A half hour later, Speed was in a

small room far out in the residential section of the city. It struck him as being rather strange that this address should be so near the place where he had been thrown down stairs.

A tall man with a hooked nose and a pointed beard had admitted him. "You're from the press," the man stated. "I am Dr. Jonlon. I thought it best that a representative of the press be here during the experiment."

He turned quickly to a small man with a dark face and a small moustache. "And this is Dr. Belheur who has been helping me with my experiment for the past six months."

Speed acknowledged the introduction and took the chair that Dr. Jonlon indicated for him.

It was then that he saw the other occupant of the small room. It was a slim girl with blue eyes, blond hair and one silk-clad knee crossed over the other. She was seated just to the left of him.

"I am Ruth Lunford," she said. "Dr. Jonlon's secretary."

"Then maybe you wouldn't mind telling me what this is all about," said Speed.

"If you were listening as hard as you are staring," said Miss Lunford, "you'd probably find out."

"... and science has long maintained that we do our thinking merely by tuning in on this thought-space about us," Dr. Jonlon was saying from the center of the room. "In other words, *our thought-images actually exist in the thought-world!*

"Jeans says. . . ."

SPEED couldn't get any sense out of it. He knew he should be making notes; but how in the world could anybody take notes on anything as screwy as this? Anyway, Ruth Lunford was taking down in shorthand everything the doctor said. He could get the dope from her later. Too, it would be a lot

more interesting that way.

Jonlon had stepped over to an innocent-looking box of controls set into one wall. An almost inaudible murmur filled the room as he closed a knife switch.

"But I must warn you of one thing," he said as he turned from the controls. "I must warn you of the emotion-monsters that exist in the thought-world: Hate, Anger, Fear and all the others. You must understand that they are as real to their world as we are to ours.

"It is they you must watch out for when we visit their world. It is they . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Speed was on his feet in an instant. "What do you mean visit their world? If you think I'm . . ."

Dr. Jonlon smiled. "And why not?" he asked. "Everything has been planned. Dr. Belheur here is to help with the scientific principles involved, Miss Lunford will take notes and you, of course will represent the press and the public."

The doctor glanced at his watch. "In fact," he said, "we are half way there now."

Speed felt his mouth go dry. He hadn't counted on anything like this. He didn't want to take part in any experiment; all he wanted was the story. And it wouldn't even make a good story. No one would read it except a few scattered science fans . . . and they'd find fault with it!

"Perhaps, Dr. Jonlon, we should go alone." It was Belheur.

Speed shot a quick glance at him and thought he caught a glint of something in Belheur's narrowed eyes. Contempt? Fear? Anger? He didn't know.

"We go as planned." Dr. Jonlon returned to the controls.

Speed felt a hand on his arm. It was Ruth.

"Take it easy," she told him. "You'll be all right."

Her face, her whole body, seemed to be shimmering and undulating as if with some strange vibration.

"Dr. Jonlon was too excited and too much in a hurry to explain much to you," she continued. "I'll try to give you the main points as we go along."

Speed felt as if his own body were being slowly shaken apart. For the first time, he noticed that the entire room was encircled with a mesh of tiny wires. The mesh was pulsating, alternately glowing and fading, shutting out the sight of the walls, the door and the windows.

"It is a matter of impulse and vibration," Ruth explained. "The wire mesh is now filled with the same type of electrical vibration that emanates from the human brain when the brain is engaged in active thinking."

"You mean," said Speed, "that this room, with us in it, is now the same as some giant brain which is tuning in on the thought-space about it?"

"Exactly. Look!"

A SECTION of the shimmering mesh before them had crumbled and dissolved into nothingness. All about them, great, jagged holes were appearing where the mesh had melted away, and through those jagged holes, Speed caught occasional glimpses of distance.

A moment later, he was standing there in a daze. The walls about him had vanished entirely and a landscape more fantastic than his wildest dreams had taken shape.

Everywhere, limiting visibility to a few hundred yards, floated a thin, misty fog that writhed and twisted as if it were alive. And here and there through the fog appeared objects in a hodge-podge of incongruity.

To the left, was a frozen lake, palm

trees and a grass hut, an automobile of radical design and several types of Oriental vases.

To his right, stood a medieval castle of rough stone whose towers and turrets rose high to pierce the grey, sunless sky.

Directly before him, was a space-ship sitting in a definitely Martian landscape. Even as Speed watched the thing, it disappeared into nothingness, taking the Martian landscape with it.

Almost immediately, a little cottage surrounded by a white fence and lilac bushes took the space-ship's place. The cottage grew larger, became gabled of roof, the lilacs gave way to rose bushes in full bloom and, from somewhere out of the grey fog, a host of tiny luminaries came to flutter about the door and windows.

"Somebody's dream-cottage," said Ruth. "It has not as yet become stabilized in the dreamer's mind."

"You mean," marveled Speed, "that whenever anyone thinks about something the thing becomes real here in this . . . this thought-world?"

Ruth nodded. "Take that castle for example. It was here the last time I visited the thought-world. It is an *established* thought."

She smiled. "Actually, it is merely a set of thought-vibrations. But since we, too, are now but a set of vibrations the castle seems real enough to . . ."

Speed felt something go wrong at the pit of his stomach. A slight tremor went through his legs. "You mean that we are . . . that I am . . ."

"Certainly! Just a set of vibrations. You see . . ."

"Look out!" It was Dr. Jonlon. He had turned to face them. "Behind you! Quick!"

Speed wheeled about—and nearly dropped in his tracks.

There, not over twenty paces from him, was the most hideous monstrosity

he had ever laid eyes upon. It was a huge formless and shapeless blob of sickly green with saucer-like, staring eyes. The whole front of its body was split open into a ragged, red maw, and it was charging amoeba-like across the intervening distance with incredible swiftness.

Speed's first impulse was to grab Ruth by the arm and run.

"It's the emotion-monster *Fear!*" Ruth shouted. "Your brain tuned in on him! Change your thoughts quickly! Tune him out! *Think that you are un-fraid!*"

Speed caught the idea. Summoning up all his confused mental powers, he stared straight at the monstrosity and thought as hard as he could that he was not afraid of the devil himself.

THE nightmare paused almost instantly, the round eyes blinked slowly out and, a moment later, the thing was slithering away in the direction from whence it had come.

"Whew!" Speed wiped the cold perspiration from his forehead. "That was the quickest and hardest thinking I ever did in my life!"

"Fine!" complimented Jonlon. "They can all be handled that way. But you must be more careful after this." He glanced at his watch. "We'll do a little looking around. But be back here in forty-five minutes. The vibration wears off then."

He and Belheur started out in the general direction of the castle.

"I'd like to take a look at the little dream-home," suggested Ruth. "Will you accompany me?"

The scent of roses in full bloom reached Speed's nostrils as he and Ruth approached the gate in the little picket fence. And it was then that Speed became conscious of the myriad strange thoughts that were chasing about in his brain. It was as if those thoughts were

all about him and he was moving through them even as he moved through the grey fog. Some of them were startling and others were shadowy things that must be even now fading with age; but there was one in particular that claimed his undivided attention. He chuckled to himself. Wait until Pug-Pan . . .

"Just my luck!" said Ruth.

Speed looked up just in time to see the dream-home dissolve slowly into nothingness and float away in the grey fog.

Ruth laughed. "That's what I get for trying to snoop into the secrets of others!"

Just beyond where the cottage had been, Speed caught sight of what appeared to be a marble statue of a nude woman. The legs were heavy and knotty and the torso seemed too small for the rest of the lady.

"The work of an amateur sculptor," Ruth explained. "But, look!"

A shaggy-coated monster was climbing up the base of the creation. Slowly it raised its hairy body upwards, flowed out over the marble and brought the white body of the woman tumbling down into shattered bits. As the brute spread itself out over the fragments, its body seemed to bloat and get larger—as if the monstrosity were feeding. . .

"The emotion-monster, *Despair,*" said Ruth. "The sculptor's own feeling of defeatism destroyed his work."

But Speed wasn't listening. His eyes had narrowed and he was trying to pierce the grey mist. To the right, between him and the castle wall was what appeared to be a battery of mounted guns. And standing beside the guns, writing rapidly in a note book, was Belheur.

Speed took hold of Ruth's arm and started silently toward the man.

"What . . .?" His quick squeeze upon her arm silenced her.

"Just what do you know about this fellow who calls himself Dr. Belheur?" he whispered.

She hurried along at his side. "Very little. He became interested in Dr. Jonlon's experiments about six months ago. And since that time he has been an almost constant visitor. But, why . . . ?"

Again, Speed silenced her. "We've got to find out something," he whispered. "Be as quiet as possible."

TOGETHER, they went silently through the grey mist toward Belheur's haunched back. He seemed too busy to notice their approach.

"You seem to have an interest in guns," said Speed from directly behind him.

Belheur wheeled, surprise and guilt flooding his dark face. He let a blank leaf fall over the page he had been working on, shoved the book quickly into his pocket.

"Why . . . why, no! Not at all!" His white teeth flashed in a smile that was meant to be disarming. "Guns are really a horror to me. I was making a few notes on this strange land for future study. You . . . you startled me."

"Strange that you should pick the latest type of anti-aircraft guns put out by the government," mentioned Speed.

"Well, really!" His smile was becoming less disarming. "I . . . I hadn't noticed. Guns are a mystery to me."

"When we get back," Speed said evenly, "I'm going to see to it that the proper authorities get a look at your notes."

The two men stood eyeing each other in silence.

It was Ruth who broke the tenseness of the situation. "Looks like a regular ammunition dump around here," she said.

Beyond the guns were various types of shells, heavy bombs and torpedoes. And beyond that . . .

Speed felt cold inside as he saw the thing. There, nestling upon a small cradle-like affair, was a shimmering airplane no more than ten feet in length. Instead of the usual cockpit, there was a cluster of tiny antennae just above the smooth body of the ship. Small wires led from the antennae to various controls.

Speed realized instantly that he was looking at the new radio-bomb that had been recently designed in Washington by army engineers for coastal defense. The bomb, controlled by radio, could drop an enemy battleship before that ship could get within striking distance of the coast.

The newspapers had carried news of the radio-bomb a scant few weeks ago, meager news — all the government would allow.

Belheur's eyes narrowed to sparkling slits. His red tongue darted out to moisten dry lips. He, too, had caught sight of the radio-bomb.

Dr. Jonlon came up from somewhere at that moment. As usual, he was brimming over with excitement and hurry. "Come, come," he said. "We are wasting precious time. Let's go into the castle. We can get a good view of the entire landscape from one of its towers."

He took hold of Belheur's arm, started away.

"What's it all about?" Ruth wanted to know as she and Speed set out to follow the two.

"I am almost certain that Belheur is a foreign agent," he told her. "A spy!"

"I've been wondering about him," she admitted. "Some of the notes on Dr. Jonlon's experiment couldn't be found a few weeks ago. Then they mysteriously returned."

"We mustn't let him out of our sight

for an instant while we're here. When we get back . . ."

He broke off short as new thought struck him. What if they didn't get back? What if Belheur had fixed it some way so they *couldn't* get back?

THE more Speed thought about the thing, the more certain he was that Belheur had some plan up his sleeve, some trick that he would pull out at the right moment.

The high castle wall, the spear-like towers and the swirling grey mist gave Speed a feeling that he was walking through a land of mystery and unreality. He expected momentarily to awaken and find that it had all been a fantastic nightmare.

There was a small door at the base of one of the towers. Jonlon flung it open, and they entered.

A stone stairway spiraled upward to become lost from sight in the dim light and the mist.

Jonlon started up. "We should be able to get a good view from the top of the tower," he said enthusiastically.

Doorways opened off the stairs at intervals into small rooms as they climbed upwards. Speed took hold of Ruth's arm and put as much distance as possible between him and the sheer edge of the steps. A false step here would be the equivalent of falling into a hundred-foot well that had a stone bottom.

He looked over the edge once and was surprised to find that he could not see bottom. The dark mists cut off his vision. It was like climbing a stairway that had no beginning or ending, a stairway that rested in the middle of a foreboding cloud of dark grey.

He turned to Ruth. Every step upwards seemed to be carrying them further away from reality. "I've had enough of this," he said. "I'm in favor of turning back and . . ."

"Ah!" said Jonlon. "We've reached

the top . . . but there are no windows. . . ."

"Here." Ruth pushed open a door to a small room and stepped in. "There should be a window or two."

Speed brushed by the two men and followed her.

"How quaint," she was saying. "Twentieth Century furniture in a Fifteenth Century castle!"

Speed, too, marveled at the incongruity. The writing desk, steel filing cabinet and modern chairs were certainly out of place in this stone room with its crossed swords, ancient armor and tapestry. He found himself looking at a blank space in the circular wall. "There should be a window there," he thought to himself.

The next moment, he was clutching at one of the chairs for support. A window—the very type he had pictured in his mind—had made a sudden appearance there in the blank wall.

Then he was standing there frozen to the spot, a chill of horror coursing through his rigid body. From somewhere behind him had come a rasping scream of abject terror. The scream died away again almost as quickly as it had come, as if it had been sucked down into some bottomless void.

Speed wheeled about, heard Ruth gasp and found that the door behind them had been closed. He hurled his body against it in sheer desperation, tried to smash it open with his weight.

The door was of thick, seasoned wood. And it had been locked or bolted by someone on the outside.

Ruth's eyes were round, her face pale. "That awful scream!" she cried. "What was it? What has happened?"

SPEED turned from trying to force the door. "Jonlon!" he said. "Belheur must have pushed him over the edge!"

"You mean Jonlon is . . . is . . .?"

She seemed about to fold up against the desk.

"... is dead! Smashed on the stone floor at the bottom of the stairs!" He went to her, took her trembling hands in his. "Hold on to yourself," he said. "Belheur locked us in here. But we'll get out. We've got to get out!"

His eyes swept the room, caught sight of a huge battle-ax hanging on the wall behind a steel breast-plate. He took the weapon down, hefted it. It weighed all of twenty pounds.

"Somebody's idea of a war hatchet," he said. "We'll see how good it is."

Clutching the heavy weapon in both hands, he swung at the door with all his strength. There was a dull thud as the crescent-shaped blade bit deep into the hard wood—and wedged there.

He braced himself against the door, tugged the ax free and swung it again. And again the ax wedged.

"The door is made of several layers of tough wood," he announced. "Cross-grained and metal-bound. It'll take a half hour to chop it down!"

Ruth was looking at her wrist watch. "But Belheur can't get away with this," she said.

"And why not?"

"Because in just twenty minutes the vibration will leave our bodies and we will be back again in our own world. Belheur knows that."

"Sure," Speed said. "And Belheur also knows that this room is about one hundred and fifty feet above solid ground. When we reappear in our own world, people will no doubt look up to see if they can find the airplane we fell out of!"

He could have kicked himself for walking so easily into Belheur's trap. He should have jumped the man when he had the chance.

"If only there was a window or something," said Ruth.

A window? Speed stopped in the act of making another swing at the door. A window! Sure!

He wheeled quickly to the blank wall. His thought-window had disappeared. "There should be a window there!" he thought again as hard as he could. "A big one!"

The window he was visioning in his mind materialized almost instantly. He went to it, looked out.

It was a long way down. Grey mist fluttered and streamed about. The freak landscape was constantly changing, taking form in the mist, dissolving again. Shadowy monsters were slithering about, feeding upon the dead vibrations of the objects that had been emotionally-marked for destruction. But a great number of the objects remained as they were—established thoughts. Only time would wear them away.

A few yards from the castle wall, was a silent, haunched figure. Belheur!

Speed watched the man, and felt the blood drain from his face. Belheur was carrying heavy bombs, placing them at the foot of the tower. He was taking no chances.

Speed realized that once he and Ruth were blasted into eternity in the tower, Belheur would have a free hand. Knowing Jonlon's secret, he could come and go in the thought-world whenever he so desired. The secrets of man and nation alike would be an open book to him.

And the radio-bomb! Belheur could sell it to another country, and that country could use it to. . .

"But how do we get down?" Ruth wanted to know.

SPEED turned, faced the door again. He had been successful in thinking a window into the wall. Why not think one into the door? Better still, why not think the door out of the way entirely?

Throwing the energy of every brain-cell into the thought, he gave it a try.

The door melted away into grey, scintillating nothingness.

He knew from his experience with the first window that once he let up with his thought vibrations, the door would reappear again.

"Come on!" He grabbed Ruth by the arm. "Let's go while I got the thing under control!"

A moment later, they were hurrying down the spiral steps that led downward into the dim well of the tower. The door had taken shape again at his back.

He didn't tell her that the tower was due to be blasted at any moment; he merely urged her along as fast as possible. He carried the double-bitted ax in his left hand.

The steps were slow and tortuous. He expected any moment to hear the sound of an explosion and feel the violent concussion as the tower came tumbling down in ruins.

He kept thinking as hard as he could, "The bombs will not explode! The bombs will not explode!"

But conflicting thoughts were trying to jam his brain. He wanted to be out of this mess, wanted to be back to the comparative safety of the streets of New York.

Once he switched his thought-trend entirely away from the bombs to think fervidly that Ruth was back in Dr. Jonlon's room where he had first met her.

But it didn't work; she remained at his side, taking the steps downward with clicking heels. Real people, he found, couldn't be juggled about in the same manner as the existing thought-vibrations.

He put his mind to work on the bombs again.

The small door at the front of the steps stood open. "We've got to get away from here," he told her then. "Belheur has mined the place with time-bombs that might blow up any minute."

Ruth screamed. She had stumbled over the inert, battered body of Dr. Jonlon.

Speed gave the crushed form a quick inspection. "Nothing we can do for him," he stated, and took her trembling hand in his. "We've got to get out."

Then they were racing through the swirling mist, silent spectres in a land of unreality.

Speed's searching eyes found Belheur. The man, a shadowy figure in the grey fog, was standing beside the anti-aircraft guns. Evidently he had heard Ruth's scream, for he had turned about and was staring at the two, wondering, no doubt, how they had escaped from the tower.

"How much time have we left?" Speed wanted to know.

Ruth glanced at her watch. "About ten minutes."

"Then I've got to get him in less than ten minutes! If he ever gets back with those plans, we may never catch him!"

Speed was already racing through the mists toward Belheur, the heavy ax swinging at his side.

"Look out!" It was Ruth who shouted the warning.

SPEED saw the thing just in time to avoid a crash with it. It rose up directly in his path—huge, hairy and ugly. The whole front of the monster's body split open in a hideous mouth, green eyes glared malevolently and a puffy tentacle whipped out to grasp his leg.

He jerked back, tried to free himself. But the tentacle rooted him to the spot, began sucking at his leg.

Speed swung his ax, swung it in a wide arc that ended with the huge blade slicing down through the head between the glaring eyes.

He felt the splatter of blood and smelled the acrid odor of brimstone as it bit at his nostrils. The tentacle whipped back.

Even as he hefted his ax for another swing, he saw the split head flowing back together as it had been before, saw more tentacles reaching out for him.

He was standing there transfixed with wonder. He felt more than ever that he was in some awful nightmare from which there was no escape.

Ruth had come up. She was tugging at his arm. "Quick!" she cried. "Get away! Run! It's an Anger or a Hate monster! It will kill you!"

Speed wheeled about, came face to face with another of the monstrosities that had slid silently up behind him. He saw them all about him now, closing in with slithering, undulating motions.

He remembered how the body of one of the creatures had bloated after feeding upon the marble statue, wondered if he and Ruth were destined for a similar fate.

Sheer torture seared his brain. His voice was but a dry whisper. "We're getting out of here!" he gasped. "Stick close behind me!"

Gripping the broad-bladed ax in both hands, he began scything and hacking a bloody path before him, a bloody path through monsters, grey mist and unreality. Tentacles engulfed his feet, sucked at his legs. He hacked them loose, sickened by the sight and smell of the living mass of writhing flesh.

Ruth screamed once, and he turned to chop loose a flowing mass that pulled at her silk-clad ankles.

Then they were through and running toward a stone wall that had appeared at their left.

Behind them came the soundless horde of monsters. Others were quickly closing in from the sides.

"If we get . . . to the wall . . .," he panted, ". . . we may be able to . . . to hold them off until . . ."

"Eight . . . eight minutes yet," said Ruth.

Eight minutes! Could he hold them off that long?

He caught sight of Belheur. The man was still standing by the guns, his dark face twisted, his thin lips grinning. He seemed to be gloating over the useless fight.

Speed's brain was groping for a way out. Why were the monsters attacking only Ruth and him? Why were they leaving Belheur alone? Was the black devil in some way in league with the demons?

The stone wall was suddenly before him. He forced Ruth into the corner made by intersecting walls and turned to strike out at the first of the monstrosities.

There were Fear-monsters among them now, great sickly-green brutes, slithering blobs of shapeless flesh.

Speed sent his ax through one of them, saw the wound heal again immediately, as if the flesh were but sticky molasses.

THEN he remembered something, remembered the first Fear-monster he had encountered in the thought world. It had been summoned by the fear-vibrations in his own mind, had been *tuned in*. And he had ridded himself of the thing by changing his thoughts.

Even as the blob flowed about his feet and legs, he summoned up all the will power within him and thought with all his might that he was unafraid.

The blob relaxed from his legs almost immediately and the saucer-like eyes blinked out. The next instant, the thing and the several more like it were flowing away from him, slithering over the heads of the shaggy-haired beasts that were still pressing in.

During the short respite, he thought about the other beasts, wondered if there was a similar way to control them.

Then there was no time for thought.

Two of the hairy things were clutching at him, and he was swinging his ax into their soft bodies.

He realized that he could never hold out against them for the remainder of the eight minutes. They were impervious to both pain and death. They would continue to flow in toward him and Ruth, cover them presently, bring them down by sheer weight. And then . . .

A small, glowing thing fluttered about his head like a tiny bird. It kept getting in his eyes, flapped against his cheek.

The thing was getting in his way. He tried to brush it aside. Immediately, there were more of the annoying little demons. They circled and swarmed about his head like bats, filled the air with sweet, brain-dulling incense and obscured his vision.

He felt that his reason was cracking. Things were so unreal. Surely this couldn't be actually happening to him! It was a horrible dream!

Needles and pins and a hundred suction pumps were jabbing and pulling at his legs. Myriad bright things were swirling and sweeping about his head, blinding him so that he could hardly see to swing the ax. And the mingled smell of brimstone and sweet incense was confusing and dulling his brain, jumbling his thoughts.

Why were the monsters attacking him? Why were they leaving Belheur alone? Could they be tuned out in some way? How? The thoughts were hammering through his reeling brain with machine-gun rapidity.

The ax became caught in something. He couldn't lift it. Cold tentacles were flowing up over his arm, sucking and pulling. His legs were becoming watery weak. From behind him, Ruth was tugging at his arm, trying to help him.

Then he was down.

Ruth's scream reached his ears as the loathsome creatures swarmed over

his body, driving away the flock of shining bird-things that had been fluttering sweet, brain-giddying musk about his head.

His struggles were useless against the weight of the slithering bodies. He felt them sucking at him, smothering him, encircling him with slow, torturous death.

Belheur!

HIS mind flashed back to that unscrupulous devil. A red haze of pure hate welled up within his brain against the man. Hate and anger that knew no bounds. He wanted to feel the pulsating flesh of Belheur's throat beneath his squeezing fingers, wanted to feel the very life of the man flow out. . . .

"Speed! Speed!" It was Ruth. She was bending over him. "Are you all right?"

He got slowly to his feet, shook his head to clear it. He was surprised to find that the monsters had vanished from about him.

"I guess so," he said. "But the monsters! Where . . ."

"Look!" Ruth told him.

He saw them then, saw them through the maze of fluttering lights that were once again perfuming the air about his head.

Belheur had been standing a short distance away, gloating over the victory that would soon be his.

But he wasn't gloating now! He was a shadowy figure running for his life with great, hairy shapes slithering after him in hot pursuit.

Speed got it then. Belheur had been directing the monsters by the black hate and anger that was in his brain. But the monsters had turned upon him, had turned because the unbounded hate and anger that had leaped suddenly into Speed's brain had been the stronger, had tuned in the monsters on a stronger

vibration.

Several sickly-green shapes, Fear-monsters, arose suddenly in Belheur's path. His insane cry of terror was the only sound that broke the unreality of the scene. He swerved sharply from his course and doubled back toward the castle wall to avoid them. The door to the tower stood open before him and he was racing toward it like a mad man.

"If he gets through the door, he'll escape them," Ruth shouted. "We must stop him some way! If he gets back to reality, we may never catch . . ."

"Don't worry!" Speed's face was grim, determined. He seemed to be waiting for something, for just the right moment. "He won't get away!"

Belheur, with the monsters at his heels, reached the doorway, entered it and flung the heavy door shut behind him.

At that same instant, there came a soundless, blinding flash of flame. The rock wall and the door bulged outward into flying debris and the tower settled slowly down in majestic silence.

Speed felt the concussion of the explosion rock him back on his heels. He caught Ruth in his arms as she was hurled against him, breathless.

She clung to him, looked up into his eyes. "What . . . what happened?"

"The time bombs Belheur placed at the foot of the tower to blow us up while we were trapped there," he explained. "I got to thinking how nice it would be if they exploded just as he entered the door . . . and they did!"

He was trying to brush away the thousand bright objects that were fluttering about his head.

He found that all thoughts of trouble

had suddenly cleared from his brain. Everything was all right again. Belheur was definitely out of the way for keeps, and the thought-world would not be exploited again, for Jonlon and Belheur were the only two who had known the real secret.

PUG-PAN, of course, wouldn't believe the story. But Pug-Pan could be taken care of. Speed smiled inwardly as he remembered the interesting thought-vibration that had struck his brain when first he had come into the thought-world. It had been a thought-vibration concerning Pug-Pan and a little girl in Texas, a little red-head who would gladly give a year of her life to know where Pug-Pan had escaped to.

Yes, the city editor could be handled nicely. . . .

And here was Ruth, close in his arms.

He brushed again at the bright objects that swirled about his head and filled his nostrils with incense. They seemed to be cramming his head with pleasant, anticipatory thoughts and intoxicating his blood with hot, red wine.

"What in the world are these things?" he asked Ruth.

Spots of color appeared in her cheeks. She leaned closer to him, her red lips parted in a smile. "It's obvious," she whispered. "Someone has tuned in on the . . . the *Love-emotions!*"

"You mean . . ."

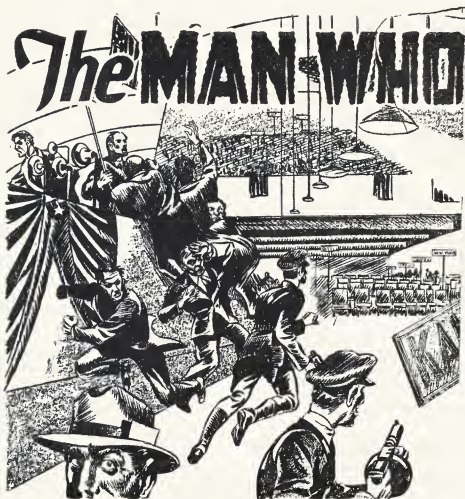
She looked squarely into his eyes. "You big dope," she said.

And then the whole world seemed to be filled with the fluttering little beasties.

THE END

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MARVEL COMICS



Desperately, now, I tried to prove to them that time travel was not

I MUST admit I was a bit discomfitted to see the prospective voyagers acting as if the four-day trip to Mars was nothing more momentous than taking the tubes home at night! All were calm and composed, and some were even bored, displaying an annoyed impatience at the delay.

In all that collected circle of people in the waiting room of Interplanetary Spaceways, I believe I was the only one thrilled or excited—I might even say nervous. I hoped I didn't show it. I tried to smile, a bit wanly I'm afraid. My heart was beating fast. Already in anticipation I could feel the shock of departure, could hear the roar of the

rockets, could see myself gazing out into the awesome blackness of space and marvelling at the beauties of the stars so much like "flaming jewels on a curtain of velvet," as I have heard.

My first trip "going over!"

I tried to act bored as if the trip would be no novelty to me, but I'm afraid that as an actor I make a very good structural architect.

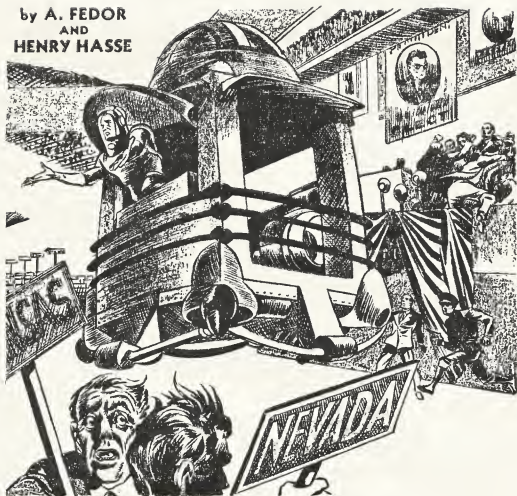
Tal Horan, who was accompanying me, grinned a bit derisively.

"Why don't you light a Murad?"

Horan was a former instructor of mine when I attended Government School E, and he is on the staff of the Government Bureau of Ancient His-

THRILLING NOVELETTE OF THE SPACEWAYS AND A SUPER-

by A. FEDOR
AND
HENRY HASSE



only possible but practical, and not contrary to any physical laws!

Had Dar Mihelson's Time Traveller indeed crashed the barriers to the past? Would Dar Mihelson, the man, indeed be able to shake hands with Dar Mihelson, the boy?

tory. Undoubtedly he was expressing a sentiment of a century gone by. He takes an unholy delight in applying such unknown sayings, and as a result is a much sought-after conversationalist. He noted my bewildered air.

"A long time ago," he explained. "the people of the world, and especially of the United States, which was the name of this section, had a peculiar habit of imbibing what they called 'cigarettes,'

which were similar to the tubes the barbarians of Venus now smoke. One brand was called 'Murad' and the makers suggested in the advertisements that one smoke a 'Murad' when one wished to appear nonchalant."

"How quaint!" I exclaimed. "But what do you mean by 'advertisement'?"

"Oh," Tal said, "that was simply another persistent peculiarity they had at that time."

SCIENTIST WHO SOUGHT HIS DESTINY BACK THROUGH TIME!

I assumed what I fondly believed to be a nonchalant air, even if I didn't have one of those 'cigarettes' called 'Murad' to smoke, and Tal Horan seemed even more amused.

I GLANCED at the Time Dial, and fairly quivered as I realized that in a few moments the pilot ship of the Spacer *Martian Princess* would arrive to transport the passengers to the mother ship, resting about thirty miles above the Atlantic ocean. I strolled—nonchalantly—over to the windows and looked across the spacious plaza to the airlock where the pilot ship would soon be snugly settled. I glanced covertly into the sky above the Atlantic, half expecting to see the *Martian Princess* hovering there, a tiny speck in the blue. But of course she was not visible. Then, abashed, I came back to Tal Horan. To cover my excitement I tried to make conversation.

"Why doesn't the Government build large enough air locks to accommodate the Spacers, so they wouldn't have to start from above? Seems to me it would be both an achievement and a matter of convenience."

"The tremendous heat and pressure given off by the rockets would cause a good sized storm," Tal explained, "and the blast would probably even melt the locks and everything around them. The main benefit of the present method, though, is that the shock of departure is lessened in the rarified air. No, I don't think the time will ever come when the Spacers will start the journey from Earth locks."

The signal light in the wall flashed its warning amber, and then the opaque screen beside it lighted up, showing us the *Martian Princess* and the pilot ship casting off from her. There was an expectant stir of the waiting passengers, and then for no apparent reason everyone seemed to mill about senselessly for

a moment as the pilot ship dropped earthward. Tal explained to me that this flurry was a throwback to the days when people had unreasonable worries and at the last moment of embarking on a trip, would begin to wonder whether they had shut the water taps off, or ordered the milk and morning paper discontinued, or whether the baggage was safe, etc. (I understand that travellers once did burden themselves with baggage! Tal vouches for this as a fact.)

Quickly we boarded the pilot ship, which was nothing but one huge room given over to seats, and Tal Horan led me to a forward seat near one of the Crystyt ports.

"Why, these seats are as soft as a cushion of air!" I exclaimed, and then blushed a red that rivalled the warning red of the light, for I had spoken louder than usual, and the others looked at me.

"That's exactly what they are," Tal explained. "They're of special build and take the entire shock."

I was saved from further embarrassment as the pilot ship abruptly roared upward in its flight. In less than a minute the *Martian Princess* became visible to me, and as we drew closer I could see that she was of rather unusual design, seeming to be peculiarly segmented. One of the smaller rear segments seemed to be missing, and as we drew close and proceeded cautiously along the side of the mother ship I realized with a sort of shock that our pilot ship was that missing segment, which would undoubtedly lock snugly and firmly into place.

I questioned Tal Horan about this.

"It's something new and revolutionary in Spacer construction," he said. "Its practicability has never been really demonstrated yet. And I hope will never need to be," he added puzzlingly.

FURTHER questions from me were impossible, as a scarcely audible

click betokened that we were making connection with the Spacer. We transhipped through the connecting lock, a grizzled old veteran of many flights speeding operations by sarcastically asking the world in general whether we thought the *Martian Princess* ran on a yearly schedule.

"Keep your shirt on, Nik," Tal Horan said playfully as we passed. The veteran looked puzzledly down at his shirt, and then grinned as he realized Tal had just been indulging in one of his archaic sayings.

"Don't mind Nik," Tal said to me. "He's always like that—anxious to be off. The Earth-Mars record is held by the Martian liner *N'Voshl*, and Nik has sworn to break that record with the *Martian Princess*. He came mighty close to doing it last trip, too."

Inside the Spacer itself we were confronted with more of the specially constructed chairs. The light flashed the familiar warning amber, and uniformed men hovered about to make sure that everyone was seated. There was a nervous wait—on my part!—of about five minutes, then the lights flashed red and a few seconds later the tubes thundered into flaring life. Just as I had expected, I was not conscious of the Spacer itself leaping forward, but rather it seemed as though a giant hand were trying to push me through the back of my seat. The roar of the rockets mounted until it became deafening—and then abruptly both the pressure and the sound ceased.

I glanced with alarm at Tal Horan. His smile reassured me that nothing had gone wrong.

"We're in space," he explained. "The thunder of the rockets can't come to us because on the outside there is no medium to transport the sound waves, and on the inside we are insulated from the tube rooms."

The signal lights were now green,

and with a general sigh of relief the passengers scurried to their various spacerooms.

"Then that's all there is to it?" I exclaimed. "But I'm disappointed! I thought it would be lots more exciting."

Tal smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid not. As usual with passengers the first time over, they let their imaginations build themselves up for a great letdown. If you crave excitement you should have lived in the space pioneering days of the twenty-first century. In these times, even space-sickness has become a rarity. However," he continued, "the days of excitement aren't over by any means. Wait until we have established regular routes out beyond Mars to Jupiter and even further. Remember the two expedition ships that were lost in the asteroids last year? How would you like to go out there?"

I shuddered. No, I didn't think I would. I felt rather ashamed, too, for the mild lecture Tal had given me.

He clapped me on the shoulder and stood up. "Well, I've got some very important work to do for the Martian History Department that I simply must get at. I'm sorry I can't show you the ship, but I think for the time being you can find your way around all right, and I'll see you later." And with a parting, "Don't take any wooden nickels," he was off. Tal is always saying the queerest things!

AND now I was free to inspect the *Martian Princess*! I could hardly wait! I had always possessed more than a passing interest in things mechanical, and now I would delve into this Spacer's innermost recesses and literally see what made things run. At the thought, I felt almost like deserting my trade as Structural Artist and becoming a Spacer pilot—as though it were as simple as that.

But—alas for my exploring plans.

There, too, I had "built myself up for a glorious letdown," as Tal Horan had so quaintly put it.

First I went to a Crystyt porthole and gazed into the blackness, really enraptured. The myriad stars against the jet curtain was indeed fascinating to the eyes, and every bit as beautiful as it was supposed to be.

But it was also a strain on the eyes, as I discovered after five minutes, and I wandered off to seek other diversion.

On consulting the specifications of the *Martian Princess* which I found posted in the library, I found that she was divided into three decks with eight quarters to each deck. The two upper decks were for passengers, the second being mostly spacerooms. The third, or bottom deck, housed the mighty engine rooms, and the observation room was in the fore of the upper deck.

But upon reaching the observation room I found that I could only look on, through the Crystyt panelling, as they allowed no passengers in the room without special permit; and as I could not understand the various processes of charting the course and other routine matters, I fled the dull spot.

As if by instinct I made my way down toward the bottom deck, my heart quickening at the thought of the various machines in operation—the automatic feeders supplying the gaseous Tynyts to the rocket chambers, the air purifying plant, and the many other things of mechanical ingenuity that I knew I would find down there. So, I descended on the escalator-service that seemed all too slow. I made my way to the entrance that seemed all too deserted. And I was brought up short by a sign that seemed all too positive:

PASSENGERS ABSOLUTELY
NOT ALLOWED

And in these days, signs mean what they say.

Disconsolately I wandered again to

the upper decks. I tried to interest myself in the automatic dials showing our speed, relative position from other heavenly bodies, etc. I attended a movie, but as usual it was one I had seen before. Even the library failed to yield anything to interest me. Other passengers nodded or spoke cheerfully to me, and I probably could have made friends, especially with that little blonde who seemed all alone and who was the *only* heavenly body of interest—but I was not in a friendly mood, and that was not the sort of excitement I craved this trip.

Gone was the glamour of space travelling I had built up in my imagination. Gone all thought of thrill-crammed days. I was disillusioned!

I made my way finally to the men's gymnasium and spent an hour in the pool, during which time I reconciled myself to my fate. Then I strolled the decks again, and *perhaps* I even hoped I would come across the petite little blonde once more. (Whether I hoped so or not, I'm not going to tell you.) The person I did come across was Tal Horan, who had probably left his work long enough to partake of a meal. I ran up to him as though he would suddenly puff into nothingness.

"Hello, young fellow!" he greeted me. "Did you take in the sights so soon?" I detected that he was laughing at me.

"Sights!" I exclaimed disgustedly. "There's nothing on this Spacer but decks and rooms and portholes and signs saying 'Keep Out!'"

HE laughed. "Didn't you say you were going to Mars to study the architecture of the ancient city of V'Nith? Well, I'll guarantee you plenty of excitement then, for V'Nith is 'way up near the polar cap, and it's pretty wild country around there. Meanwhile, though, I guess I'll have to find

something to interest you. It's too bad that I'm so confoundedly busy, but—hey, there's Dar Mihelson! Now why in the world didn't I remember that *he* was aboard? The very answer to our prayers!" And all excited, Tal Horan fairly dragged me over to a tall, soldierly fellow who was gazing ruminatively at a dial in the wall. I wondered in what way *he* would be the answer to our prayers.

"Hello there, Dar Mihelson," boomed Tal Horan delightedly. "By the red tails of all the Oogs on Venus, how'd you get on board? Allow me to present Wade Turrin. He's—ah—lonely!"

I would have been resentful, and perhaps sulky, had I not just then caught sight of the Government Service emblem on Mihelson's sleeve, embellished with three gold stars, signifying thirty years in the Service. My hopes rose considerably, for who would not delight in talking with a G.S. man, and especially a three star G.S. man? I shook hands with him, at the same time taking stock of him and comparing his points with my trade, as is my habit.

"Structurally well built," I thought, "but something about the 'interior decoration' at fault." It was Dar Mihelson's eyes that gave me this opinion. They were clear, and steady, but in them lurked such a bitterness that it was evident he had once been greatly wronged—or that he had wronged someone and ever after regretted it.

"First time?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said, and then added: "I probably have that fact written all over me."

"I'm sorry to be leaving you, Dar, but I have that history to write out. If I don't see you again look me up at the embassy in Kalthoon. What I want you to do is amuse Wade. Tell him a story—the story." And Tal Horan raced back to his everlasting history.

I had pricked up my ears at Tal Hor-

an's "Tell him *the* story"—but I decided to let Dar Mihelson broach the matter in his own way, or at least not suggest it to him until due time.

"Uh—you're sure you've nothing important to do, sir?" I asked politely.

"No. I'm entirely at your command."

"As are ever those of the Government Service," I replied gallantly.

His lips quirked in a smile. "It brings its own reward, you know; and then, the Government Service means just that. You, probably, have always known the Government as it is today—a far cry from the archaic nightmares of Monarchies, Dictatorships, and Congresses. Ask Tal Horan about that."

I NODDED in agreement. Certainly, the change in Government had taken a Utopian swing when the World Revolution of the last century had swept out the old and replaced it with a truly representative World Congress.

"What branch of interests do you represent?" I asked, breaking the reflective silence.

"Minerals, metals, and elements," he tabulated. "My work is mainly research into new uses for metals, new compounds of elements, and the classification and study of new elements or combinations."

"Then you're going to Mars to investigate that new element they claim to have found!" I exclaimed, remembering what the Televox had said on the subject.

"Claimed" to have found is right. For my own sake I hope they do have a new element—it will make life once more worth living."

"You don't make your work sound very exciting," I observed.

"That is the way of Youth!" he retorted. "Until they have reached their majority, it is excitement. Having attained their majority, it is achievement.

And having passed their majority, it is commonplace retrospection. But—I suppose that way is best.” Another silence fell.

“How soon will our trip be over?” I asked asininely. I knew perfectly well the schedule.

“Why? Are you really becoming so tired of it? Or are you simply eager to set foot on Mars?”

“I don’t know,” I confessed. “I’ve looked forward to this trip for so long and kept building it up as a wonderful thing in my mind, but now that I’m on my way I find it as dull as taking the tube home at night. And apparently no more dangerous. Why is that?”

“Well,” he sighed, “I suppose everything that dissatisfies us—even your lack of danger or excitement—can be blamed on achievement. When interplanetary travel was the germ of an idea, it was imbecilic. When that germ grew and flourished and developed, it became something wonderful and exciting. Now that it is an actuality, it becomes simply a matter of science and engineering. Once we have achieved something, once it has been placed in the daily scheme of things, we immediately forget the hardships and toil of achieving it, and strive on toward something else. Only the benefits of present and future are thought of. We live for today, prepare for tomorrow, and forget the past. Don’t ask me if this is all for the best. I used to think so, but now I have ceased to wonder.”

I suddenly connected this man’s strange mixture of bitterness and sadness with that story that Tal Horan had mentioned; and just as I was wondering if I should ask Dar Mihelson about it, he spoke:

“I suppose you’ve been wondering what Tal meant by *the* story.”

Had he read my thoughts?

“Indeed I have,” I replied eagerly.

“And would you really like to hear

it? However, you must never mention it to another person. Tal meant that I should tell this story to you—oh, yes, Tal has told me all about you! You’re practically his protege.”

I nodded my head in agreement. I could see that for some reason Dar Mihelson was eager to unburden himself. (I later learned from Tal that such was Dar’s state of mind that he had to tell his story to someone at intervals, or go mad.)

He began, slowly.

“To put it mildly, it’s queer how such utterly impossible things can happen. I don’t mean how they *do* happen, but how they *can* happen. And I mean, literally, ‘utterly impossible’ things.”

He fell silent, marshalling his thoughts; and as bitter memory surged back, the bitter reproachful look dominated him like scars across his soul. I was atremble with eagerness, for I felt that this story was going to compensate me for a disappointing trip.

“Were I not in the G.S.,” he continued, “I most certainly would be prepared to be disbelieved. Thirty-one years ago it was, that I passed my rigid tests by the skin of my teeth and was elected to the Government Service. I say by the skin of my teeth, because from my earliest life I was skeptic, a disbeliever in things of pure conjecture and fancy. When I was admitted to the Service my Government Classification read: ‘Dangerous to advanced thinking.’

“I dealt in facts and figures, not fancies. I prided myself on my matter-of-factness, and when I entered the Service, with all the impudence of Youth I definitely made my character known.

“Shortly after my entrance a purely wild petition came up before the Council. I mean—listen to this, now—a petition for a Bureau to delve into the possibilities of—of all things!—time

travel. Well, you can imagine what happened, with my skepticism plus my youthful ambitions. I was out to make a name for myself, to become a leader. Here was meat for me!

"And I was as a starving wolf after the meat. I jumped on the petition with both feet, I raved against it, I prepared evidences against its possibility, I denounced its sponsors as lunatics, I declared everyone fools and imbeciles who believed in it, and asked if the Council would make a laughing stock of the Service by allowing such an obviously idiotic thing as the possibility of time travel to be investigated.

"And during a convention called to pass upon the question—among other things—I'm proud to say I defeated the bill by myself, by my own efforts. Oh, I was an able speaker—a gifted one, if you will—and, you see, I was really sincere in my disbelief. One thing I will always remember about that convention was the rather clumsy attempt by the petition's sponsors to get their point across. In the very midst of the discussion the lights went off for about a minute, and when they came on again, there on the speaker's dais stood a square box of metal about as tall as a man—in fact a man stood in it, obviously one of the sponsors' confederates. There was a panel of milky glass—what a crude disguise!—through which we could barely see his face. But we could hear him distinctly as he began to argue in the cause of time travel. He did not get far, though; the trick was too obvious. The lights went off again for a minute to allow him and his contraption to disappear. Of course the Government Service today is above such tricks.

"Suffice it to say that my very sincerity was infectious, and the petition for a Bureau for investigation into the possibilities of time travel was denied. And so I went happily on with my special work on metals, basking for

awhile in the light of the public eye because of my courageous and commendable stand. I had earned a reputation—at least as a speaker.

"So ten years passed and I earned my first gold star.

"It was in the eleventh year that the utterly astounding thing happened that was to put a blot on my soul. I was in the laboratory one day reading a report of a metal that was being shipped from Mercury, when before my very eyes, and but a little in front of me, a chunk of metal simply *materialized* and fell to the desk! But that's not all: on the desk where the metal fell I saw several little drops of red, and then I saw that the metal itself was bespattered with this red. And it took but the briefest test to show that this was blood."

Here Dar Mihelson stopped his narration, and reaching into a pocket, drew forth a good sized, irregular piece of metal. I took it. Even to my inexperienced eye and touch it was utterly different than any metal I had ever seen before, with a sort of greenish dullness.

"I have said," Dar Mihelson went on, "that I dealt only in facts and figures. It is a good thing, because the experience I have just narrated might well have shaken a man less materialistic than myself. Although I was amazed, I was not unnerved. I simply sought a natural explanation. I had seen the entire happening so clearly that I knew there was no trickery.

"I tried to trace the metal's origin. It did not seem to have any. I sought its classification. It definitely did not have any. I exhausted every possibility—and you know that means a lot of possibility, I being head of the Bureau of Metals of G.S. I applied every known test again and again, and some tests that were unknown. I arrived exactly nowhere, except that I could not fail to

notice certain peculiarities of the metal itself. I was baffled, but refused to admit it yet; I would find some explanation—reasonable or unreasonable—of why a chunk of unknown metal spattered with blood should appear out of the air before my eyes.

"Then, quite by chance, I came again upon the report I had been reading at the time I was interrupted—the report of the metal being mined on Mercury. To ease my mind I sat down to finish reading this report. There were the usual details: only a small vein had been discovered, in a mountain range close to the Solar side of the planet, and it had been mined under great difficulties because of the intense heat. The expedition had thought it wise to cease operations, but they were sending a small shipment for experimental purposes. They thought I would be interested because of the intense heat. The expedimental. According to the preliminary tests they had made (the report continued), the metal seemed radio-active, highly explosive, and 'hard to keep in one place.' In their make-shift laboratory one of the workmen had mentioned something about some of it slipping out of his hand and disappearing.

"I leaped to my feet. From what I could gather from this meager report, the metal being sent from Mercury conformed closely to that mysterious bit of metal which had materialized out of the air before my eyes! And that about the Mercury metal being 'hard to keep in one place'—could that mean—? But what nonsense! Their shipment was still a million miles out in space somewhere—or probably was just now leaving Mercury, and wouldn't arrive on Earth for another week! Besides, there was the question of the blood on my mysterious chunk of metal. How explain that? No, there simply could be no connection between my chunk and the shipment coming from Mercury. That

was an utterly wild impossibility.

"NEVERTHELESS, because I had exhausted all other possibilities, I nearly became a nervous wreck waiting for that shipment. On the day it was to arrive I had urgent business elsewhere, and I instructed my assistants to merely place the metal in my laboratory and leave it strictly alone.

"I returned to find my laboratory wrecked! I learned that one of my assistants had dropped a box of the metal and had been blown to bits!

"Instantly an insane thought leaped to my mind. Here would be an explanation of the blood on my mysterious piece of metal—if the two metals proved identical. And a comparison showed that they were.

"But my metal had materialized a week ago!

"Again was my mind in desperate turmoil. I tried in vain to think of any explanation save the one that was now dawning on me, but I could not. Inevitably the one explanation for the materialization of my bloody chunk of metal was the one I disbelieved most. In the explosion its unknown power had been released so that a piece of it had been pitched to me *back through time!* I recalled the report about the metal being 'hard to keep in one place.' Hard indeed!

"Naturally I tried to rid my mind of this insane notion. I tried to fortify myself with the 'evidences' I had offered against time travel ten years ago, but beside this indisputable evidence they now seemed weak and childish.

"It was then that I lost entirely my skeptical attitude, became open minded, *believed!* I may have once been matter-of-fact, but when I am shown, I am shown!

"I worked on this metal from the sun-baked mountains of Mercury—worked in secret. With a ton of it placed in the

right spots I could have split the moon! But I did not have a ton of it. Indeed the shipment had been small. However, it was not the explosive power of the metal that interested me now. I worked hard with an eye to the possibility of time travel only, and gradually I mastered the metal, brought it under my control.

"And I succeeded at last in proving what I had tried to disprove ten years ago with empty words!

"I went then to the Chief Adviser and laid the entire story before him. He did not scoff, as I would have done ten years ago. I took him to my laboratory and gave him practical demonstrations. I convinced him.

"He wanted me to never let the secret out. It was improbable that any more of the metal could be mined, but if it were, he would order an embargo on it and none but the innermost Government Laboratories would ever see it. Aye, the Chief Adviser was far wiser than I. He foresaw the unusual, perhaps even disastrous effects that might come about if actual time travel were attempted even on the smallest scale. He told me to drop my line of investigation. Risking dishonorable discharge, I disobeyed him.

"Explaining that I wished only to test its peculiar explosive properties, I received permission to retain the metal, and then I hurriedly continued my experiments and at last finished my Time Traveller, crude though it was.

"AN ageing man does strange things, Wade. Here I had my Time Traveller. I could not reveal it, and yet I wanted to put it to some practical use. And I could only think of one thing.

"Maybe it was because I had grown repentant. The future? It should have interested me, but somehow I did not even think of it. I could only think of

one thing. I can see now that I leaped into it blindly, with little preparation, and perhaps I even gave up too easily—but I really think it all turned out for the best.

"One deserted midnight I established my location. I entered my Time Traveller and set and locked the controls for ten years and a certain number of days in the past.

"All I was conscious of was a violent lurch to the left and another to the right, the two movements almost simultaneous. Was that all? Had I indeed crashed the barriers to the past? I was not sure what had happened, or indeed, whether anything *had* happened. Through the panelling in front of me I could only see out into a place of darkness. Then there were strange rustlings that my mind magnified, and I could hear a murmur of voices.

"Then lights flashed on. I had succeeded! For a very astonished convention was staring at me, or rather at my Time Traveller! Apparently the radio-activity of the metal had effected the radio-lights in the chamber.

"My hand on the door of my Traveller, I was about to step out. Then I stopped. I shouldn't—must not!—emerge. *There was a very important reason why that assembled throng should not become aware of my identity!*

"From the confines of my Traveller I began to speak, in a loud voice, and from the silence that fell I knew that they heard. In a few words I explained my Traveller and why I appeared before them. Desperately now I strove to prove to them that time travel was not only possible, but practical, and not contrary to any physical laws as popularly believed. I have always been a good speaker—and I think I was beginning to make an impression, when something happened. A member of the convention, without even signalling for the

floor, leaped to his feet. I have never seen such flagrancy.

"'Fraud!' he bawled. 'It's a trick of those who want to pass the petition! Did we see the machine, if you can call that absurd thing a machine, materialize? NO! Because someone turned the lights out long enough for that outlandish contraption to be placed there on the dais. I'm surprised, not to mention ashamed, that this convention should foster members who have the colossal impudence to try to win their point with such an obvious trick as this! Are we children? Have we not minds that we can see through such an out-and-out fraud? It is no less than an insult to suppose that we have not the intelligence to know that time travel has no place save in the books of some fanciful author! Do not those petitioners for the will-o-the-wisp of time travel—those members who, I am happy to say, constitute only a minority among us—do they not defeat their very petition by being able to present us only with these clumsy tricks, instead of some definite proof in support of their theories? Has not, on the other hand, proof after proof been produced that travel through time is not only impossible, but utterly—'

"Oh, he was an able speaker, and he was one to hold his audience. In vain I tried to make myself heard against him. A murmur arose; grew louder. Angry glances were beginning to be cast toward me. There he stood in the midst of his audience, gesticulating, haranguing them, the words of derision, of ridicule, of disbelief, tumbling forth from his lips. He was a master of fiery denunciation.

I SAW the hopelessness of it all, and I saw that the only thing for me to do was return to my own time and forget all about convincing anyone of anything. As to time travel—I was not now so sure; but I knew I would never

make another attempt, which might prove far more disastrous than I could imagine. I would melt down the metal into its original state and destroy all records of my control over it.

"Again I set the dials, and as I felt the lurch I was conscious that the radiolights in the convention chamber had gone out again. I came back safely. I carried out my plans protecting the secret of the metal."

Dar Mihelson sighed as he finished his story, and his eyes were again glowing with that bitter, reproachful look of a wronged man.

But—damn it all, his story had ended rather tamely, I thought, and for the life of me I could still not understand the bitter look in his eyes. So again was I disillusioned! There was no excitement to the Spacer trip, and now Dar Mihelson's story hadn't ended right. True, it was an interesting one, but somehow incomplete, vaguely unsatisfying. I felt that there was something else he should have added, just one more little item that would somehow clear up something that was vaguely puzzling me.

I sighed. I felt that the trip was going to be a hundred percent loss.

Suddenly the signal lights awoke with the warning amber, which slowly gave way to the red, signifying danger. An orderly appeared.

"Stand by the Spaceboats," he said with a calmness that transmitted itself to us. "An uncharted meteor is looming ahead and we haven't time to change our course."

Instantly the Spacer was the scene of hurried, but orderly, activity. Quietly we stood by our posts, a certain number to each quarter, with an officer waiting for a signal. I felt my heart pumping with excitement. Then through the speaker came the order: "Prepare to cast loose." The officer stood with hand on the unlocking de-

vice, and the instant the light flashed red he threw the lever.

As I have said, the *Martian Princess* was a three-decker, each deck divided into eight quarters. Now, as the officer's hand came down on the lever, I understood the peculiar segmented appearance of the *Martian Princess* as I had seen it from the outside. Each of these sections in itself was a miniature spacer with its own motivating power!

We braced ourselves as we hurtled outward at a right angle. Then, peering through the porthole, I saw a dozen or more miniature *Martian Princesses* hurtling away from each other in a perfect, ever widening circle. A few seconds later the huge meteor mass plunged through the space where the big *Martian Princess* had been.

There was sweat on my brow.

"Well," Dar Mihelson smiled at me, "was that excitement enough for you? You're going to get a real thrill in a few minutes, too, when you watch all the tiny *Martian Princesses* draw together again and re-unite. That's a sight I've always wanted to see myself, and at last I shall. Marvellous, the things they think of."

Yes, I had gotten my excitement, but I decided the score was still a half and half proposition. The trip seemed to be turning out all right, but Dar Mihelson's story hadn't. In spite of all else I could not forget that. I could not forget that he might have mentioned just

one more tiny item to make his story complete.

THEN, suddenly, I knew what that missing, puzzling, neglected item was, that could satisfy the baffled curiosity in me. I turned to the G.S. man.

"About that story of yours," I said. "Tell me—when you travelled back through time to the convention, who was that member who denounced you so vehemently as an impostor?"

Dar Mihelson stared at me, incredulous.

"My God, boy—do you mean you don't know, you can't guess?"

Then he laughed, queerly, and his hand went to his brow.

"But, well, they have all asked that, the few to whom I've confided. They seem to ponder, to puzzle awhile, and then they inevitably ask that question.

"Who was this person who snatched the cup of victory from my lips, leaving only the bitter draught of memory? Who was this person whose very presence there cast a scar across my soul at the thought of the dangerous ground I had trod but must never, for the sake of my sanity, tread again?"

He paused, and that bitter, reproachful look dominated him entirely, overshadowing all else. And he fairly wailed the single answer—and I was content—the score was a full hundred percent.

"Myself . . . !"

**AMAZING FACTS FROM OFFICIAL POLICE FILES!
STARTLINGLY TOLD IN THIS ACTION PACKED ISSUE**

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NOW ON SALE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

WHEN DISEASE DIES, MUST HUMANITY DIE TOO?—STRIKING NOVELET

SUBSTITUTE FOR WAR

by D. D. SHARP

Author of "Faster Than Light," etc.

With his discovery of orillium, the radio-active principle that would completely wipe out all insects and disease, had Cyrus Schultz indeed saved humanity—or doomed it to inexorable and eternal hell?



Maybe my unbelievable smallness could be used for untold good!

MURIEL was then no more than nineteen and as freshly alluring as a first spring rose. I have seen old ladies smile as she passed their windows, and lean to watch her out of sight. What she could do to a young man's heart, I best knew. But Muriel was not only lovely, she was loyal, staunchly so, and she had other

substantial qualities of character that raised respect for her when she was, too soon, called upon to meet the tests of suspicion and gossip.

Even as a child she was boastfully proud of her father, and all the world was proud of him then. Her pride and trust endured even when the world turned bitterly upon the scientist it had

once acclaimed.

She was first hurt and puzzled, then secretly bewildered, not by the attitude of the world, but by the strange behavior of her father. Cyrus Schultz was still a great, kind god, to her, and she defended him valiantly, though she could not deny, even to herself that he had woefully changed.

For her sake I would have fought for him, had that offered any solution. As it was I decided passionately I would carry on where Schultz had laid down. I at least would never fail her, never cause her to feel anything but pride in my career. She carried me away, stirring my romantic imagination to believe that for her I could fire the world as she put torch to my inflammable heart.

Such was my rose-colored imagination, burning with passionate young love that focused eagerly upon the future without prosaically examining the past. But, even now I would not have had those rosy glasses lifted from my eyes, though my lot has become anything but that which I expected.

I REMEMBER Muriel seemed to be unusually depressed that last morning she and I were together as normal young man and woman, as though her intuition, or a weird telepathy, warned her we were both on the verge of an experience which would prove queer and startling.

Another great war was fanning out over the world. As of old, men were again diverting progress and invention to the insane accomplishments of hate and destruction, and I had received my call. Eager to prove my heroism I was proud of my commission, and probably showed it in my stride.

It nettled me that Muriel was so depressed, not by the war but some immediate danger she felt upon us; and the conviction of her premonition, she made no effort to conceal. I knew from

her manner that she was also weighted by some decision she could not make, and suspected that old Cyrus Schultz was at least partly responsible for her mood.

Even as we walked along the crowded sidewalk she glanced quickly here and there as though alarmed or suspicious that someone might be shadowing us. She asked me more than once if I had seen her father. Whether indeed he had not approached me with some strange proposition. She spoke too of a policeman who had recently vanished as though dissolved into the air after he was last seen entering her father's laboratory.

"Pierre," she begged, as we approached the squat old building that housed the laboratory, "Wait here. Please don't come any nearer. Father may be watching at the door."

She was almost in panic, so I halted, took her by the shoulders and grinned down on her as though she was a very foolish little girl.

Across the block the gray stone lab was like a pigmy in company of giants. It stood back in the middle of a little plaza which Schultz would not sell, and was walled around by towering office buildings. It seemed as strangely deserted, encircled by the roar of traffic, as an empty school at recess.

"Please Pierre," she cried hysterically so that even the city robots turned to stare.

"O. K.," I agreed, "but hurry back. I'll wait."

I watched until the street crowd enveloped her, then discovered her again, crossing with the light, a trim, fascinating flame against the drab dullness of the mob. Her pink skirt whipped a moment through gray shadows of a moss ridden wall, then a solid, unglazed door swallowed her, to leave me infected with her own foreboding, as though her strange alarm had dropped its

mantle upon me.

An hour passed. The sensation that something tangible and yet concealed, was trailing evil through the quiet building, became as definite as vision. There seemed to be a muted voice calling, Muriel's voice, crying out for me to run, to keep away. I knew that she was in grave peril.

Unable to restrain my imagination, despite my promise, I began to dogtrot down the traffic, pushing here, dodging there until I reached the intersection, rushed across the street, and then short cut across the grass, to save the extra steps required to follow the arc of flagstones that led to the door. There I grasped the wrought iron knob with my left hand and drew my service revolver, then without knocking, pushed open the door.

THE room was webby with shadow that contrasted annoyingly with outside brightness. Only after my eyes accustomed themselves to the gloom that was meagerly filtered through with grayish light from high dusty windows, did the paunchy form of Schultz develop.

He was hunched upon an enamel stool, his warped ankles twisted around its forward legs, his eyes fixed upon a brownish chemical which he was pouring slowly into a porcelain cup through the lip of a graduating glass.

As I closed the door he turned, blinked mildly with more surprise than annoyance. His baby-blue eyes were ridiculously timid. He looked as little the dread inventor of lethal combinations which had given him new fame, as a gold-fish looks like an octopus. Nor, indeed, was the laboratory at all what I expected to find.

Except for the fact that there was no other door or likely exit from the room, I believe the sinister premonition that still racked my imagination would

have at once evaporated. But that lack of any other possible escape, and Muriel too evidently nowhere in the big room, crinkled my scalp. I remembered the policeman who had disappeared here without clue or trace.

Impossible, insisted reason. There was not a panel in the gray plastered walls, not a seam in the cement floor. The furnishings were too meager to hide a child. Muriel, like the officer, had disappeared. It recalled eerie tales of the old scientist and his discoveries which I had not believed.

Could he indeed, I wondered, have done away with her? But she is his daughter, I reminded myself, and he loved her, I knew. That quieted my fears for the moment, though I still scanned the laboratory.

A little out from the wall, the laboratory table extended almost the length of the room. It was littered with a grotesque jumble of chemists' paraphernalia in nickel and glass. On its shelves were bottles and flasks of many sizes, and many hues were in the varying depths of liquids. Nothing here greatly different from any ordinary research laboratory, and still for all the display of innocent creative industry, the man humped upon the stool radiated an aura of gorgonian horror. The brain lobes under that shiny scalp, I was well aware, incubated more destruction than Xerxes or Caesar. But of course legally he was no more criminal than I.

His face was broad and bland. His eyes mild and sweet, but the creative brood from his brain, even as I interrupted, was probably busy with some new terror of modern war. His whole life of late had been devoted with insane passion to such business. Nor had he the sanction of patriotism, or self defense, for until our own nation had become involved, he had bestowed his products with equal favor upon all belligerents.

And yet, he had once been as eager to husband life as he now seemed to destroy it. Only during the last fifteen years had he been so vicious. Before that he was the world's most renowned humanitarian. His discovery of orillium, alone, had brought him honorary recognition from Universities over all the earth. Orillium, as you know, is the radio-active principle that is so lethal to germ and insect life, though harmless to human beings. It was this discovery which made insects as extinct as dino-therium, and rendered disease but a nightmarish memory of old men. Just how much the expectancy of human life has been raised is so great, it can only be surmised. Even with the great war in progress scientific men believe there is still a real threat of overpopulation of the livable areas of the earth.

WITH the discovery of orillium the beneficent period of Schultz' life ended abruptly. A few years later he endeavored to enforce patent rights, and thereby prevent the further manufacture of the germicide. Court above court overruled his claim, stating it was against the common good.

After the last possible appeal Schultz became morose, even Muriel could not seem to cheer him. More and more he secluded himself, and soon his laboratory began to hatch most terrible chemicals. His ingenious brain spewed death gases, caustic sprays, disintegrating waves of sound and light, which the nations gobbled up, even while agghast at their potentialities.

These hideous paradoxes in her father's nature wrung Muriel's heart, and I understood as I studied him why she loved him. As an individual he was pathetic. Even as I shook off the weird paralysis his fixed stare had set upon my limbs, his sweet blue eyes disarmed me. I felt foolish and without excuse for my bold intrusion.

The stillness, which was disturbed only by a faint hissing in a vat at the end of the bench, became quite embarrassing. I didn't know what to say, nor how to gracefully withdraw. To avoid the unblinking stare I peered across the room. My eyes fell upon a massive table about two feet square. It was so stoutly constructed it might have served as the pillar of a porch. Upon it was a chessboard, set with chessmen as in the middle of a game, and before it was a very heavy oak chair, with narrow boxes panelling each side in the place of ordinary arms.

When I looked back Schultz had lifted the cup and was gazing at it thoughtfully. He spoke, and there was a melancholy smoothness in his tone, though his words were strange and confusing.

"It is said that God gave his Son to save a world?" he said, and his withered lips pursed as though he rebuked the idea. "Do you think God did right, son?"

The sudden question didn't quite make sense, and still there was nothing in it to warn me of the horrible idea he must have been turning over in his mind.

When my confused silence lengthened, he spoke again. "I have made no appraisal of men's souls. I have not even found calipers or scales to measure them, nor even a prism that will yield the spectrum of their glory, so I must leave out of this any determination of eternal life. My woes are strictly physical, and with that I have been trying to deal."

He lifted his face, then raised his albino brows as to question if he were not right.

"You know," he went on, "what muddling I have done with that? Desiring to stretch a man's period for acquiring knowledge, the outcome is a curse, to me, to you, to everyone that

lives! Men swarm like flies upon the poor, denuded carcass of the planet! City joins to city! Buildings shut out the sun!" His voice fell. "Famine overtakes the poor. To those whose plight so moved me, I have contributed immortal penury."

HIS eyelids blinked quickly, his warped fingers knotted together. "Had I but the courage of God!" he cried. "This brown chemical may be all our salvation."

He unknotted his fingers and pushed back the glass as he continued in a dull, flat key. "I have though but one attribute of God. I can sacrifice. I am not able to resurrect."

"You mean?" I cried with a shiver in my spine. "Good God, Doctor Schultz, you don't mean?" My voice squeezed out thinly, afraid to utter the thought thrusting at my mind.

"To preserve the race," he whispered, his face quite radiant. But suddenly his eyes narrowed. They regarded me with penetrating calculation, as though he was now aware of my horror and my resolve at any cost to myself to forestall his consideration of Muriel for a laboratory guinea pig.

"You love her," he said bluntly. "Would you be brave enough to take her place?"

He pushed the cup toward me. "It is a sullen drug," he said with some display of drama, "but it promises a new and ample earth."

"Where is Muriel?" I demanded and thrust my gun toward him.

He smiled at the weapon and then into my eyes. "You wouldn't murder me, son, but you're nervous, and one can never tell what a nervous boy might do. I'd feel better if you sat down, over there in the chair by the table, unless you will put away the gun while I explain."

I went to the chair and sat down, lay-

ing the gun across my lap so that its muzzle covered him.

"That is much better," he mumbled. "Now—ah yes, my discovery. If wheat grains became as large as footballs, wouldn't that turn the trick? One grain would be enough to feed a family several days. Or if eggs, say, were the size of barrels, or cows—?"

"Sure," I agreed, "that's the idea. Much better than dumping queer chemicals down a man. Something perhaps more effective than B₁ or colchicine sprays."

Schultz shook his hairless head. "It will never come that way. Here, drink."

"No," I growled with the defiance of fear. "Muriel!" I shouted with the hope that she might, despite appearances, be hidden within reach of my voice.

"You will never find her," he said harshly, "nor anyone, ever, if you refuse." His eyes glittered with presumptive confidence. There could be no doubt he was aware that his weapon was far more powerful than my own. My fingers twitched with hysterical desire to dig them into his throat and shake his secret from him. Still I dared only sit and parry his demands.

It's all bluff, I thought. Muriel will come back in a few moments and show him up. Nothing will be lost and everything may be gained by playing for time.

My averted eyes fell upon the chess board.

"Let the game decide," I suggested and plucked at a chessman.

"You would need strong fingers to move one of those," he taunted with a goading cunning in his eyes. "*That king must weigh near two hundred pounds!*"

I TUGGED in disbelief. My tight fingers found a queer softness in its little hands that gave them the feel of

flesh. I noticed then that there was an ashen, blood-drained hue in its cheeks and its tiny eyes stared unseeingly with a vacant, glassy fixity of the eye-balls that was anything but pleasant. It appeared, indeed, the stiffened corpse of a Lilliputian man, and its sloping forehead, its aggressive upshot jaws, and especially the healed crease of an old wound across one palm, gave me a vague stir of remembrance.

Small as it was, it conjured that mood of unreality and apprehension one feels when he is forced to doubt the immutability of natural law. Schultz, it occurred to me, might have, after all, mastered natural phenomena in far greater measure than any one had guessed. More than once he had astonished even scientific societies with concrete evidence of accomplishments previous ideas of cause and effect had catalogued as impossible. Yet, when he had irrefutably explained his process, other men were soon duplicating his product.

So, only the scope of my imagination confined the possibilities that might develop from the weird little figure between my fingers.

"All there," Schultz complained. "Every atom of him with electronic structure compressed. I did not then know how to decelerate orbital velocities. If he had lived to down one swallow of this compound, it would have dissolved the lethal burden upon his heart. But he is dead, stone dead, son. Wheat grains the size of footballs are no use to him."

I gaped at the old chemist with frank incredulity. Yet it fell upon me how great indeed would be earth to a race of people so ridiculously small.

Gazing intently to discover what evidence the chessman itself offered of the fantastic avowal, I did not notice Schultz' legs untwine from the stool until his boot-toe was already poised above a foot-switch below the table. Suspect-

ing its connection with the queer chair in which I sat, my alarmed desire was to get up.

"No!" Schultz shouted. "There, that is better," he said more quietly as I sat back, knowing he could electrocute me before I could escape, if he so desired. "There," he soothed, "just sit quietly. It would be disastrous to shrink you before you drank. Cardiac muscles so tiny would be unable to lift the mass of your bloodstream, even if you were prone upon the board. The compound will remedy that now. You need not lie like the policeman, too heavy to move, to even live. Come!" he became suddenly dominating, "drink, or I make room for you on my board."

He thrust the cup toward me.

"I'll kill you first," I threatened. "Take your foot from that switch."

"Careful!" he warned. "Between the electrodes hidden in that chair, you could be no more helpless. They will shrink you dense as stone and as motionless. Only the compound can help you, Drink! Drink it for the salvation of the world!" His face became radiant again, his eyes gentle.

THERE was no escape but to kill him, yet he was Muriel's father, and his eyes were much like Muriel's eyes when great plans and hopes excited them. There was no heart in me to squeeze the trigger, but I made a sudden and desperate effort to leap clear of the chair.

Before my legs straightened, before I could even shout out, as I intended, lightning broke across me in crackling, stuttery jets. Its livid tongue seemed to freeze the marrow in my bones, to constrict the tendons of my arms and legs and every muscle of my body. Backward I dropped, limbs stiffened, nerves shot with a prickly distress as though they had gone to sleep.

In front of my startled eyes the gray

wall behind the chess-board seemed crawling with a horrible growth that extended it wider and wider, higher and higher, while it moved back from me, further and further, until it appeared no longer the wall of a room, but a far and dizzy cliff.

The ceiling lifted until its white plaster floated high like an autumn cloud. In the chair was a magic yeast. Its arms swelled out from under mine, and rose far above my reach, above even the utmost angle of my vision; and the floor fell down so far I could see only deep empty space below me.

Schultz became a giant my eyes could not encompass in a single look. The chess-board, now far across a gap of space, spread wide carpets of red and black, and the fallen king became the statue of a normal man. He was flat on his back and very still. Beyond him were planted thick ivory pillars which I hardly recognized as pawns. Beside him was a black knight, a monstrous ebony horsehead, mounted on a thickly cushioned ebony base, upon which I could have sat in comfort.

My gun had fallen to the great floor of the chair-bottom. Its muzzle pointed large as a navy gun and as completely useless to me.

My head hummed with a strange dizziness. Not even in a dream had I ever felt so queer and so utterly helpless, and this increased my fright.

A monstrous hand, with fingers large as myself, swept up, to close down upon me and I was lifted across deep emptiness as by the hanging jaws of an electric crane. The fingers steadied me upon a black painted carpet, carefully balanced me upon my feet, then left me upon my own.

The strain upon my legs was terrible. My knees wrenched with pain and almost gave way as the huge fingers departed. It was torture enough to crack my will, had it not been more frightful

to give way, to lie as the policeman lay, with eyes fixed upon the ceiling. As long as life was in me I determined to stand so that I could see Muriel if she came into the laboratory, for, despite my plight, I was alarmed for her.

As wracking pains numbed beyond definite sensation I stood staunchly, trying to adjust my sensations and to make some plan that would ease my strange predicament.

My heart felt queer. It had ceased its wild pounding and seemed dead still. My lungs too were quiet as though they had completely collapsed. My eyes fixed straight ahead. No power of my will could shift their focus to follow Schultz as he moved about the room.

A SHOCKING thought hit me like a chill. Could it be that I was already dead? What assurance had there been that dead eyes were blind and dead ears deaf so long as their electronic structures retained positive and negative charges? Had not experimental scientists often contended body cells lived long after the apparent demise of the individual?

Above my head swept a sigh like wind upon a mountain-side, and a voice like an overpowered loudspeaker rumbled, "If only I could have made him drink."

Great, watery, tub-sized eyes peered into mine to move this way and that, now in, now out of the fixed focus of my gaze.

I made an effort to cry out, but could not even squeak; tried to move, ever so little to show him I was still alive.

"The cup! The CUP, Doctor Schultz." I intensified my thought upon it, trying vainly to impress his mind. "I'm alive! See, I'm alive. Pour a little into my mouth. Try, try anyway."

But no sound passed my lips, no muscle moved even a little, and Schultz too plainly received no mental impression for all my thought concentration.

"Dead," he rumbled with hopeless pessimism. "Fool. Fool!"

I have had dreams when I could not wake, nor cry out, nor move a muscle. This was far more terrifying, this living death.

Far below Schultz' boots thudded upon the cement. He moved away, then came back again. The cup, taller than myself and round as a cistern, came down beside me with a crunch upon the chess-board. Over the vessel splashed a wash of fluid, one sip of which might lift the crushing weight from my legs, might even give me movement and breath. It washed down the porcelain cup to reach the board, to flow under my very feet. And I was fixed as stone.

All afternoon I endured, listening to long, dead silences between Schultz' movements here and there about the laboratory. Once there was a pounding upon the door and a splash of clean sunlight brightened the great wall cliff at the end of the room. Loudspeaker voices bellowed. Once I caught a section of mountainous uniformed men passing the chess-board. The police, I knew, had come to investigate. Would they suspect? Would they deduct what had happened? Hope rose, and faltered.

The men left through the door which closed behind them. The sunlight was blotted from the wall. There was deep silence except for Schultz pacing the floor, a brief clinking of glass, and once the screaming whine of induction coils so near they almost drove me deaf.

Then Schultz halted somewhere near the center of the room. I smelled a tingly acrid odor, heard a heavy suging, the crunch of something heavy, then a voice that aroused renewed effort of my will to turn my eyes that I might also see.

Muriel! But where? She seemed far below the floor.

When she spoke again she was within the room, and yet the door had not

opened. "Daddy!" she cried, "Pierre will be frantic! I must at least telephone him."

"Now, now, now," he cajoled, "a little patience, child. Is this Pierre so important?"

"Important? What must he be thinking? He'll be worried to death. Oh, daddy, why are you so dominant?"

"There! There!" he soothed, "just sit down a bit. That chair before the chess-table. Let us talk things over frankly, Muriel, as we did when there was only you and your old daddy, and no Pierre to distract us."

ACROSS the room her shadow fell toward me as she moved toward the fatal chair.

I discovered then how impotent is thought without motility; how desperate knowledge without communication.

She took the chair, coming into my field of vision. She did not seem like my Muriel. She was a cloud of misty silk, a great white glade of soft throat, a lofty eminence of profile. She sat too high for my gaze to reach her eyes.

"You are all I have that is close and dear to me," he said. "I would do anything for you."

"You have no right to ask that I give up Pierre," she defied.

"I will allow you Pierre," he said calculatingly, "if you will try the new compound I have completed."

"Why sure," she agreed eagerly, "that will clear everything."

"I will not mislead you," he replied. "There will be no danger to your life, but it will make you odd. You would be different from other women. You would seem queer to your friends, be stricken from the companionship of all other human beings."

She got quickly out of the chair and ran across to where Schultz must have been standing with his foot poised near

the contact switch.

"Please," she cried, "don't talk like that. You frighten me. There is something awful in your face. Oh, let's get out of here. It—it's queer. I feel frightened, and strange, like—oh like something horrible was watching us."

"Very well," Schultz agreed, "go back to your room. I'll notify Pierre that you will see him tomorrow. Perhaps then you will be more willing to trust me."

There was the crunch as of stone slipping into a niche, then Schultz working at something with steel gliding softly upon the cement floor. He soon rose, and went out the door. I heard the click of the lock and knew that I was alone.

Upon me crowded new and distressing thoughts. Schultz' words to Muriel revealed my own situation with stunning force. Odd, he had said. What a toy, indeed, I was now. What a grotesque and pitiful figure for Muriel to see. Her love could hardly be expected to survive the ridiculous disproportion between us. And still, I loved her so much, even to deny myself of her, even when to have her would mean more than ever before. Not for anything would I want her to endure what I had become, even if the chemical worked; she a little doll, so small and disproportioned from those whose companionship she valued, so helpless and so queer, with only Pierre for companionship, and him dumb and moveless forever and ever.

SUCH were my thoughts that bitter, lonely night. At times a wave of hysterical urgency would sweep me, demanding that I stir, that I master my ponderous body, that I do something to prevent the horrible experiment Muriel faced when day would come again. Again, I would fall into a despondent mood of self pity, thinking of the gulf

that had fallen between me and the girl I loved. Never must she see my diminutive form, I vowed. Never must she suspect my ridiculous proportions. What a hero I would be to her, what a ghastly disproportionate lover.

To arouse myself from utter despair, to prevent Muriel sharing the same, or even a more uncertain fate, I felt that it was imperative that I bestir myself. Desperately I turned my mind to the problem, though there seemed no key which would unlock my prostration.

Waiting, waiting, my protesting legs all but toppled me off the determination of my will. "Why so dogged obstinate against the inevitable!" they cried.

The cup was so near I could have touched it had I been able to raise a hand. I cursed it with such furious anger as only silent, immobile frustrated action can afford. The round porcelain handle was almost against my cheek. The damp, warped pasteboard, where the acrid liquid had trickled, gathered rolling furrows that pressed my toes.

Into the vast, black windows filtered pallid luminosity. The late moon was rising over a city that was now so large as to stagger my imagination. The luminous crescent crept up to spread across a window glass, six times wider than my arms could span. Its pale whiteness fell into the laboratory, bewitching the great hall with fantastic terrors of gigantic bigness. Unseen beside my feet was the policeman, either dead, or transfixed much the same as I. The fixed position of my eyes forbade me a look at him.

"Poor devil," I thought. He had given up easily. Or had he? Wouldn't weariness force my body to the same defeat before dawn?

I glared at the moonlit cup. It was beyond my power to remove it from my gaze, or my gaze from it. I dared not allow my heavy lids to fall. I was sure

I could never raise them back gain. Yet the taunting cup outraged me. It raised fierce hatred of its white obstinacy, of the potent, liberating liquid so solidly walled from my benefaction. Hate became abhorrence. Abhorrence erupted into unreasonable, flaming rage.

"Devil!" I damned it with that utter violence that can be gathered into wordless passions. And the cup sat impassive as my silent lips.

"I'll break you," I vowed. "If I fall against your handle, you will tilt to the floor. I will be prone, but rid of you."

But it did not fall to the floor. I gauged the handle with my eye, released my numb control of the right knee. Quicker than I dreamed I toppled and was down, but my right shoulder hit the cup-handle, bringing down upon it the sledge power of my hundred and seventy pounds. The cup probably weighed half a pound, fluid and all. It upset with a plop, like a flipped coin when a blade is pressed hard at its edge. It came down completely covering me, catching me under liquid that was trapped by the smooth rim upon the oiled board. Down on my back, there was still enough left inside the cup to cover me, but how much more I had no way of ascertaining.

IT seemed to leak out very slowly. I lay covered a long, long time. The stuff didn't strangle, though my mouth was wide open. I suppose this was because I was not breathing. It did sting my wide open eyes even after I allowed their lids to fall of their own gravitation. It filled my mouth and slowly trickled into my throat. There it seemed to halt a while but finally gurgled down. In my stomach it was warm and tingly, and soon, to my distress, I strangled.

Desperate with suffocation I did not at once recognize this was sign of deliverance. Not until my churning arms and legs spun me around the inside of

the cup, did it occur to me I was moving, and might stand up with head well above the remaining liquid.

How long I stood, I have no idea. It seemed a very long time. When I heard air bubbling under the rim. I tried to raise the cup. It lifted easier than I had thought, and I crawled from under.

Dawn was frosting the window glass as I got to my feet outside. I walked to the policeman, but he looked hopeless. Only death could have given such vacancy to his eyes. My next thought was to survey my surroundings, so I circled the knight base, stepped from chess-board to table-edge. The depth below was frightening, even across to the chair was too great a distance to hope to accomplish.

There was little I could do but wait until Schultz and Muriel came, so I returned to the wooden base which supported the monstrous horsehead of the black knight. My legs ached wretchedly. What a pitiful hero, I rebuked myself for falling into such a trap. So tiny and so utterly incompetent. Powerless, even, to get down from a table.

Bitterly I sat, listening for the coming of the conquering giant, who yesterday was no larger than myself. The sensation most dominant was that I had toppled from earth and landed into an alien and illogical realm where all things but myself were large and prodigious.

I heard a scratchy scampering below the table. Hurriedly I reached the brink again, peering over at an animal that was quite shocking to discover. I knew it was a rat. I told myself repeatedly it was a rat. But it was so enormous, having the proportions of a bull, it might have been some strange species of African big game.

It squealed and ran as the front door swung open, and I, quite as startled,

made haste to reach the spot where Schultz had stood me, striking as stiff a pose as I could muster.

He came up puffing wheezily, glaring down at me as though I had been in his thoughts all night. His enormous eyes shifted to the cup. He stooped to scan the table. His chin was close, like the bulging rump of a great elephant, his eyes lowering almost to the level of my gaze. He lifted the cup slowly, peering into it, setting it down carefully, turning to peer at the floor below the chess-board. His hip turned as he scanned the floor, until it pressed the table. The skirt of his black alpaca jacket lifted over me like a sidewalk awning. It seemed to be the opportunity I wanted, though a minute later I was sure I had made a grave mistake. I clutched the hem of the jacket and hung on.

SCHULTZ soon finished his inspection, grunted heavily, then straightened, while I, still clutching the jacket hem, slid down the great expanse of his trouser seat until I hung dizzily below the table.

He strode across the room, heaving me side to side with the dromedary rolling of his hips, and sat upon the stool. Only by the most dexterous movement did I avoid being sat upon.

He worked industriously. I locked my legs and arms as far around the stool leg as they would encircle it, then slid down, whizzing in quick and alarming descent to the floor. There I scurried under the table, swung myself up an insulated wire to the top of a mammoth wet battery, and sat there, waiting what might develop.

Schultz did not work long. Soon he rose with a long spouted can in one hand. At a far corner of the room he poured a stream of reddish liquid upon the floor to outline a square.

As the liquid touched the cement it raised a great cloud of acrid vapor, and

soon there widened a crack into which I could have thrust an arm or a leg. Schultz stepped into the square, reached upward beyond my vision to press something and the cement square sank, dropping him slowly into a hole.

When his bald head was below floor level, I swung down the insulated wire, hurried across to the edge of the hole to peep down.

There was little I could see except the shiny top of a great bald head, but I heard Muriel calling him as though deeply distressed.

"Come," he growled harshly, "if you want to see Pierre. He is waiting in the laboratory. Now drink this, as you promised."

As I moved around the open hole I saw that he had another great cup in his hand. Muriel came into view, though I could only see the fluff of her hair, part of a soft blue dress, and an out-thrust arm. She took the cup, raised it to her lips.

Defying the humiliation of having her discover me in my diminutive state, I shouted loudly as I could. "No! No! Stop!"

She lowered the cup, cocked her head. "What was that?" she demanded.

Schultz too cocked his ears upward. "I must set a trap," he said. "Mice have gotten into the laboratory."

With no more hesitation she downed the draught. To my relief no change whatever occurred in her.

"That wasn't bad," she said. "Now take me to Pierre."

"Come then," he said petulantly.

She stepped beside him upon the elevator and it began to rise as slowly as a hydraulic lift. Long before they were above the cement floor I was hid in one of a pair of bedroom slippers that were under the table.

"Sit down, child," he said quite tenderly when they were within the laboratory, "there before the chess-table."

His voice quivered.

"Daddy, what on earth?" she exclaimed, "Why why you're crying?"

I peeped out of the shoe. She had taken the fatal chair. Already one of Schultz great gaiters raised, hesitated.

In the moment that his toe waited above the contact switch a thousand ideas tumbled into my head. There were panicky demands that I act quickly, and a base desire to do nothing at all. Muriel on my own plane would afford the only incentive or meaning to life in my midget state. But of course my whole heart rebuked that desire. Even had she chosen knowingly to join my plight, every instinct rebelled against condemning her to the humiliation of hiding in slippers, or under tables to avoid curious eyes.

BESIDES her sacrifice was unnecessary, even to prove her father's compound. My own motility did that. The experiment was not only useless, it was cruel and criminal. Yet what could I do, so small, too weak to even prop away the impending toe?

Or was I indeed so weak? Crazy thoughts came crowding as the great toe poised. Might be my unbelievable smallness could be used for staggering harm or untold good in a world where men would overtower so hugely as to never suspect my presence in their chambers or office buildings. Maybe strange secrets would open to me. Certainly there was no lock that would turn me from the prison of a rebel nor the castle of a dictator.

Queer such ideas should confuse me when I needed so much those more practical. And, having no better plan I crawled over the side of the slipper, and began squeaking at the top of my voice as I ran toward the middle of the room.

Such a queer creature, waving its hands and piping English words at the top of its voice, should bring any girl

from her chair in amazement. That I had hoped for, but in my haste and anxiety I had overlooked that which should have been quite evident as inevitable, the one reaction that was bound to take place when Schultz also saw me running across the floor. I had banked on him understanding at once what had taken place when the cup overturned, the moment he saw movement in my body. I had counted on it being the proof he was seeking that the great dream of his life could be attained. But, I did not expect him to leap hysterically to both feet, clamping down the contact before Muriel had time to get out of the chair.

That was more than a year ago. Since then Muriel and I have discovered that it is not we, but the world, that is abnormal, and daily we find new advantages afforded us by the relative differences in our size and that of other men and women.

Schultz, big hearted dad, provided us with a colony of little folks, volunteers they, and he built us a little town in a mountain valley that seems wide as the earth to us. Around is the sublimity of stupendous peaks and upon us civic and political freedom that was never fettered by the decrees of long dead men.

Schultz still delights in scouring toy stores for little painted chairs and tables, which he brings out in his great overcoat pockets. From them he purchased our railway system and the little automobiles that run good as big ones and with far less danger, on our tiny roads.

Until you read this, no one I feel sure, has even suspected the existence of our town, for Schultz has fenced it wide and posted the big ranch in which it lies. Yet I wonder if one day someone may not stumble upon our canyon and be amazed at the tiny faces that peer from doll house windows.

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

MARVEL'S NEW SENSATIONAL SCIENCE - FICTION DEPARTMENT

by RAY CUMMINGS

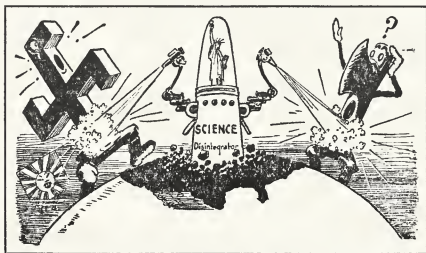
*American Science Faces the Invader . . . Nothingness Becomes a Reality!
. . . Motorists of the Future Will Do Their Driving At Night!*

"I Can See the Invisible!"

WAR was declared a week ago; and our enemy has boasted that he will assail our Atlantic Coast on the first foggy night.

The fog has come tonight in a solid

ocean; the rising turret of an enemy sub-sea vessel, with upward-slanting rocket-tubes. They are taking the range of New York City—easy enough for them to gauge the blade of the huge city's light and sound, which even in wartime cannot be effaced. Within a minute now the enemy's bombs will go hurtling.



blanket. You are in a little metal cubby-house perched on the brink of a headland of the New Jersey coast. Somebody says grimly:

"It won't be a 'plane. Those depth cruisers they've been boasting about—"

The goggled man beside you says, "Here's the infra-red image-grid—"

He checks himself. Your heart seems to leap into your throat. This infra-red detector has all evening been searching the invisible ocean and sky through the solid fog—and now at last it sees something. The grid suddenly shows a segment of the far-distant

Around you the interior of the cubby surges with swift action. The range of the invisible enemy ship is calculated. The night silence is split by the roar of the nearby guns.

A hit! The infra-red screen goes blank. There is only your own imagination to picture the glare of the bursting shells; the litter of the shattered vessel; the upflung geyser of water; and then the sullen boiling spot of ocean where the enemy was, but is, no longer.

A war scene of things to come. But it's entirely possible, even now. In a little metal shack on the New Jersey

Coast, an infra-red detector, perfected in the General Electric Laboratories, at Schenectady, searched the dark ocean for a U. S. Coast Guard Cutter. The lightless vessel was invisible to the naked eye; but the infra-red heat rays generated by her engines made the whole outline of the ship visible to the detecting instrument. The range was calculated. An unlighted searchlight projector was mathematically trained on the invisible target, and then suddenly lighted. And the distant ship was instantly disclosed!

Machine-Made Ghosts

YOUR wife says, "I don't want to see a play with ghosts in it. I feel creepy when I go to bed. Whatever did you get tickets for this for?"

You chuckle. "Don't worry," you tell her. "They're not real ghosts—just machine-made by modern science."

You are sitting in the first row balcony of the big shallow-bowl interior auditorium with your hooded binocular-grid spread before you so that the big distant stage seems only a few feet away. The ghosts come in the third act. Despite the fact that your mind is on the machinery which you know produces this optical effect, the scene is so realistic that you find it gruesome. And the dramatic story which for three acts has worked to this climax makes it so pathetic that you feel almost as though it were happening to yourself. Several of the living characters of the play are to be banished from this world. They struggle against it. With their loved ones around them in tearful farewell, you see their solid bodies dissolve until they are shimmering wraiths . . . vanishing ghosts thin as dissipating wisps of fog, until at last they are gone into Nothingness. And out of the

empty air there is only the sound of their wailing voices as they struggle to get back, but cannot.

You decide not to tell your wife how it was done; that would spoil the illusion. You agree with her that the modern theatre is extraordinarily realistic.

The basis of this is a 1940 reality. In Milan an Italian engineer, Mario Mancini, did exactly what I have depicted. He used an electro-optical apparatus which projected a ray of light vibrating at the rate of 400 to 800 billion vibrations per second. The ray itself cannot be seen. All objects are visible because they reflect light-rays of a vibration frequency which the human eye can register. Bathed in the Mancini vibrations, they disappear, turn wraith-like as the ray increases its vibration-frequency until presently they are gone into Nothingness.

Trapped Light

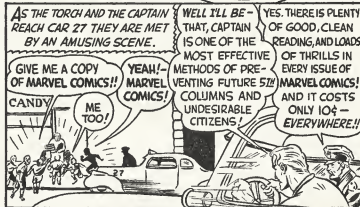
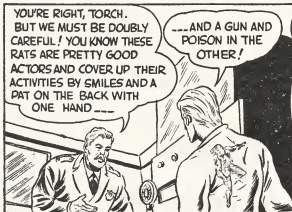
LIKE most other motorists you are eagerly waiting to take to the road tonight. It is a momentous occasion. Tonight at midnight by law all automobiles must be identically equipped with what the newscasters have been calling "trapped light"—the new headlights of polarized light. You can use any power you like, so you have equipped your own car with powerful beams to do justice to the occasion. And you have taken the dimmer off and thrown it away forever.

At midnight you start, and presently you are on the open road. Your headlights are beautiful—they light up the road and all the surrounding country as though you were using a ship's huge searchlight. Then in the distance you see an approaching car. It is evidently driven by a fellow after your own heart. As he comes rounding a curve just

(Please turn to page 105)

MARVEL COMICS Presents

A short-short picture story featuring the **HUMAN TORCH**



ahead, his gigantic white searchlight beams sweep in a great crescent over the woods, the fields and fences.

Then on the narrow straight stretch of road, you and he come at each other. The road between you is lighted bright as day. Your beam falls directly upon his car, brightens it as though sunlight were on it. Swiftly now—from your optical viewpoint—his beams are fading. You see them growing dimmer, dwindling until his headlights seem only two little dull-red spots. And you know your own lights look the same to him. . . . In a second, bathed in your glare, he has whizzed safely by.

A dozen cars are ahead of you on the road now. Modern night driving. It is amazingly beautiful to see the shifting, swaying searchlight beams as they swing over the somnolent dark countryside. And always they are trapped and optically subdued as they approach you,

while your own huge lights remain at their full power.

This, you say, would be very nice? Well, science is ready for it now! All we need is the commercial equipment—and that will be forthcoming whenever the laws are passed making its use compulsory. Polarized light is that from which the jumbled waves of ordinary light have been strained out, leaving only those that are vibrating in a single plane. A new optical material for doing it has been perfected by a young Boston inventor.

With all cars identically equipped—headlights and windshields of this polarizing "glass," and the optical axis of the polarized light set at a forty-five degree slant—the effect will be exactly as I have described.

Night driving of the very near future will be very different from what it is tonight. (Continued on page 112)

How I Became a Hotel Hostess



"Iva Sheppard"

Seamstress, Without Experience, Becomes Hostess of Beautiful Hotel

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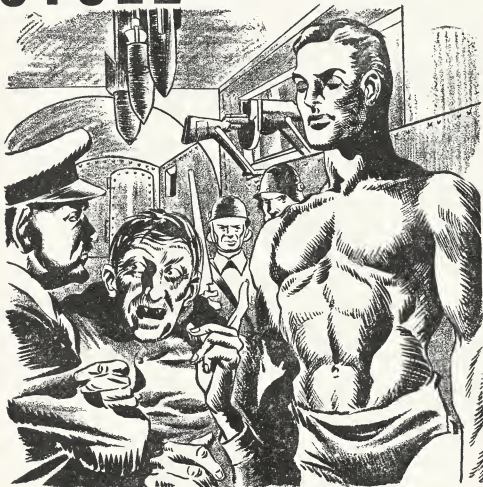
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CYCLE

by JOHN L. CHAPMAN



"It's amazing!" Tinsley ejaculated. "What a ruler he will make!"

If momentary exposure to the cosmic rays beyond the Heaviside Layer made a super-man of an ordinary mortal—what fabulous titan of strength and intelligence might the human become who'd spend hours under such forces!

NOT long after the first jet had missed fire, Drake sensed that something was wrong. When a second blast became punctuated, he was certain.

The sudden realization of danger appalled him. Everything had worked perfectly until then. Now he was alone—first man to leave the earth's atmosphere, literally suspended high above the vast pattern of continents and oceans, and his ship's jets were misfiring!

Quickly Drake cut the acceleration,

went back to check the tiny cruiser's mechanism. He knew without extensive examination that a tube had been burned out. With only part of the jets firing, he'd never reach the Moon on schedule. His supplies wouldn't last—he'd starve before he could return.

Drake moved back to the control seat. The color drained from his face.

It wasn't a nice feeling—meeting trouble in the vicinity of the Heaviside Layer, knowing that trouble meant an agonizing drop to the ground far below.

He sat there for a moment, thinking. Something flared before his eyes momentarily. He was conscious of a change within him. At first he thought it was the weightlessness of deceleration. But as minutes fled by, and the ship's velocity decreased steadily, the certainty of a change became more prominent in Drake's mind.

HE forgot the ship and the Moon flight and the long drop to earth. He was engrossed in a sixth sense that had gripped him. It was as though all his senses had converged and given him a new and greater sense, one of strength and pulsing life-energy.

Astounded, Drake dropped back in his chair. Time became incomprehensible. He didn't know how long he sat there, his brain in a stupor. Of a sudden, things went black.

When he awoke the ship was falling. He was still conscious of a great change, though at the moment his mind was intent only upon righting the ship's plunge.

The forward and side ports blazed with streaking stars. The massive blue globe of earth whirled by, then the Moon, and the far-away yellow sun. Drake found himself sliding forward in his seat. Groping, nauseated, he fumbled for the strap, found it, and laced himself to the chair. The shifting weightlessness made his head ache, left an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. It might have been worse, he kept telling himself. Physically, he felt as if he could withstand much more than the nausea of a whirling ship. He could withstand almost anything. . .

The ship lunged into the seemingly bottomless atmosphere. Down, down, it spun, each turn bringing the dull gray land closer to the ports. Drake watched, grinning.

He grew weak again, almost passed under before he spied the control bar

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and a new urge came upon him. He groped for the lever. He knew just what to do now; there was only one way that he could save himself.

His hand closed over the lever as the shrieking wind grew to an almost unbearable din.

* * * *

In the World Tower Michael Gurth turned from lavishly draped windows and moved to where thin-faced Raymond Tinsley sat in brooding silence. Gurth breathed deeply, inhaling the luxury-scented air of his spacious abode. He looked down at the wizened scientist, his face emanating scorn, his eyes narrowed, shading the greed and power-lust that his prominence had given him.

Michael Gurth was dictator of the Western Hemisphere. Alone he was complete master of half the world, the supreme ruler of his time. Here in the World Tower he isolated himself from his subjects and his enemies—who in many cases were one and alike. Resembling dictators who had gone before him, Michael Gurth was a victim of widespread hatred, and for that reason alone, he lived in self-imprisonment in the World Tower, a fortress ably protecting his life and ideals.

"You believe," said Michael Gurth in soft, subdued words, "that Drake is dead, don't you?"

Dr. Raymond Tinsley almost cringed at Gurth's probing stare.

"It's not possible," said the little scientist, "that Drake is alive. That is my assertion. Now, may I ask, why did you summon me? Why are you so interested in Drake?"

Michael Gurth slid his hands over the sleeves of his silken cloak. "Everyone, Dr. Tinsley, is interested in him, because he is the first man to attempt space travel. It's obvious that I wanted to talk to you—you're the constructor of Drake's ship."

"But why—"

"Tell me," said Gurth. "Did Drake pass the Heaviside Layer?"

Tinsley scoffed. "I've no time for absurd questions—"

"Then he did pass the Heaviside Layer."

"I don't know. Judging from his velocity and the time that telescopes were able to follow him, I should say yes. But it has no bearing on the matter. Drake fell somewhere near the coastline. That we know. Unless he was superhuman, he couldn't have survived."

"Perhaps," said Michael Gurth with a slow smile, "he was superhuman." He studied Tinsley, amused. Then he straightened. "Enough of that. I'll get to the point."

HE clapped his hands once and a procession of four immediately entered the room. Three were guards who promptly retreated. The fourth, in the eyes of Raymond Tinsley, was a superb specimen.

The body and build was perfect. A wide chest tapered from broad shoulders. The hands were huge and strong. The legs were long and muscular. The hair looked as though it might have been dark at one time. Now it possessed a golden luster, matching the slitted gray eyes whose piercing gaze sent a chill down Tinsley's spine. Never before had the little scientist seen such masculine beauty.

What's more—the man was Drake.

"You see," said Gurth, "he was superhuman. My men found him that way, and brought him here secretly—for a special purpose."

"Drake!" exclaimed Tinsley. "You're alive, but what's happened to you? And the ship?"

The answer came in soft whispers. "I'm not sure, Tinsley. I can't explain. Gurth is a scientist—he can tell you."

"Of course," said Michael Gurth. "I'll tell both of you, and as well I'll explain a simple plan by which the Western Hemisphere will dissolve, so to speak, the Eastern Hemisphere."

"Power - mad!" snorted Tinsley. "Like all the rest of your kind!"

Gurth smiled again. "Not exactly. Merely a program for unity."

"Never mind," wheezed the little scientist. "What about Drake?"

Gurth strolled to the windows, gazed a moment at the glassy arc of World City, and returned. He said, "Drake was the first man to pass the Heavside Layer, the first human being to meet with the utter unknown. He was exposed to the natural cosmic ray forces, the same forces that the Heavside Layer prevents from reaching the earth. You recall, Dr. Tinsley, an age-old theory of evolution concerning cosmic rays? The life forces, they were called, the origin of the animate impulses. Yes—you begin to comprehend, don't you? You understand now what has happened to Drake. He has been exposed to naked cosmic rays, and as a result he was super-evolved. He's a man of the distant future—far ahead of our time and thinking!"

Tinsley was peeved. Why hadn't he thought of that?

"It's amazing!" he ejaculated. "Why, he must possess intelligence far beyond our wildest dreams! What a ruler he'd make!"

"True," mused Michael Gurth, "but Drake won't always be that way—and he knows it. You can see he has no enthusiasm. He'll return to his normal self in a matter of months. His exposure was too brief to have permanent effect. If something hadn't happened to his ship at the time, he would have been evolved to unimaginable greatness. Do you see, Tinsley, what I'm getting at? If I were in his place—traveling beyond the Heavside Layer in a space ship and

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waiting a considerable period before returning to earth—you can see what the answer would be. I would be gifted with unlimited power and military prowess that would enable me to dwarf the Eastern Hemisphere in a matter of weeks!”

“The logical conclusion!” snapped Tinsley. “But you have no ship!”

MICHAEL GURTH looked from Tinsley to Drake and back again. “You built one for Drake—you’ll build one for me. You might have known—I’d never call you here without a definite purpose in mind.”

So Dr. Raymond Tinsley was assigned to a special laboratory and given ample time and assistance to construct a new space cruiser. His nearest aid was Drake, whose knowledge of space mechanics soon became a necessity under Gurth’s pressing orders. Both were guarded constantly, to insure secrecy of the dictator’s plans.

Tinsley urged Drake to strike back at Gurth while his physical and mental strength offered him the chance. The little scientist was amazed at Drake’s viewpoint. He was soon to realize that Drake regarded their task as a magnificent joke.

“You needn’t fear, Tinsley,” said Drake one day. “If my so-called might is ever in pressing demand I’ll respond. If not, I’ll be content in building Gurth the finest space ship he’ll ever see.”

Which Drake proved to both Tinsley and Gurth consequently. Possessing the equal intelligence of the future-man, Drake was able to construct a ship that surpassed by far Tinsley’s wildest aims. Tinsley became *his* assistant, though he could offer little aid in view of the perplexing mechanism that Drake devised.

In less than a month the hurried preparations were completed. Michael Gurth lost no time in rushing the program to strengthen his power. It was strange, he thought to himself, that a

mere flight into space could give him such military genius.

The take off was conducted from the roof of the World Tower. When the sleek ship was lost in the blue morning sky, Gurth’s agents began spreading the news of the dictator’s flight.

Tinsley and Drake were freed. Before the little scientist returned to his own laboratories he tried his pleadings on Drake once more.

But to Drake, the matter was still a joke.

Tinsley scorned him. “A joke you call it! I can’t understand you, Drake! You’ve a perfect chance to dethrone Gurth and take over yourself if you like. But you’d rather wait—until your strength is normal and you’ve lost that precious intelligence!”

“That’s true,” said Drake. “Soon I’ll be normal again, won’t I?”

“And Gurth will be superhuman! You built him a ship that couldn’t possibly fail! It would have been so simple—”

“I know, Tinsley. It would have been simple to make the ship flounder the moment it left the ground. Such a plan would have erased Gurth, but it would arouse suspicion among his lieutenants. That would be fatal. No,” he added, reading Tinsley’s thoughts, “I’m not in league with Gurth. Of that you can be certain.”

THE rockets were blasting in perfect order. Below, the ship’s mechanism purred unerringly. On the screens, the shadowed side of earth blotted out the night sky.

Michael Gurth tensed himself. Dancing needles on the control board told him he was nearing the Heaviseide Layer. Promptly he cut the acceleration, and waited for the change to take effect.

Idly his gaze travelled across the image of the earth’s night side. They

would be waiting for him down there, their eyes searching the heavens expectantly for the return of a new dictator whose rule would soon encompass both hemispheres. He reminded himself to repay his gratitude to Drake and Dr. Tinsley.

Minutes fled and the acceleration decreased rapidly. The change began.

Memories of previous dictatorships slipped from Gurth's mind, were replaced by new and strikingly different means of rule. Military maneuvers were predominating factors, simple plans that would demolish the Eastern Hemisphere in a few hours. He wondered for a brief moment if Drake had experienced such things.

Michael Gurth lay back and absorbed the rich vitality of the unseen forces from across space. He closed his eyes and wondered about the fact that space travel would be impossible until man found a material repellent of cosmic rays. He laughed. Why would man want to travel in space when it was possible to create power and intelligence by such a simple method?

For hours he waited, scarcely thinking of going back, concentrating only upon the flood of intelligence that was in his brain. Time became incoherent to him. He could think of nothing but his own mind and of his putting it to use.

He was still thinking of that when everything snapped before his eyes and he was conscious of a terrific pain in his head. Gradually it subsided. When he regained his senses again, he knew immediately that he had forgotten every notion of power and dictatorship. He had forgotten who or what he was, and but for a fraction of a second he could remember only the look on a man's face, an expression he had seen before, but had undoubtedly overlooked.

The man was Drake and the expres-

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CYCLE

sion told him instantly that Drake had foreseen his fate, had known that too much exposure to the cosmic life force would evolve one beyond the highest point of evolution and back to the very beginning. Drake had learned that from his experience. He had known that evolution, in likeness to space and

perhaps time, was a cycle that brought its subjects back to their original form. He had known that a super-ship would assure the dictator of perfection and lure him to test its superbness on this momentous journey.

Michael Gurth opened his eyes and looked at himself. He had returned to his original form. He was short, bow-legged and fuzzy. He was an ape.

THE WORLD OF TOMORROW *(Continued from page 105)***"They Fall But Do Not Die!"**

YOU realize, as you stand on the hillock watching this huge experiment upon a hundred men simultaneously, that the purpose of this test is really the desire to overcome the enemy. The method is humane, but that is merely an added attraction.

You are standing with a noted Surgeon, with the Director of a great Motion Picture Company, on location near Hollywood. But this is not the making of a motion picture. It is a very real battle scene, conducted under the auspices of the U. S. War Department. A hundred young men have volunteered. Most of them seem nervous and somewhat pallid, because the weapon to be used against them is as efficacious as modern science can make it. They are all wearing goggles to protect their eyes, which by chance might be injured by this new weapon.

At a signal the hundred young men start running in open formation, charging over the undulated fields at a mythical enemy. From a mile or so away, a long-range gun fires a shell. It strikes just ahead of the running men with a splatter of turf. Another strikes to the left of them; and another to the right.

The young soldiers charge on. No other distant enemy shots are fired. But in a moment one of the running soldiers seems to stumble; he falls; lies

still. His companions leap over him. Then two or three others go down; a whole line of them topples. It is as though some invisible enemy were soundlessly raking them with machine-gun fire. Fifty or more are in a moment strewn inert on the ground. And every second others are dropping. . . . A mere dozen or so of the original hundred are able to gain the distant hilltop which was their goal.

The Surgeon beside you says, "Easy enough for the enemy to capture those men who are lying there. They are not dead; not even injured. They have merely fainted!"

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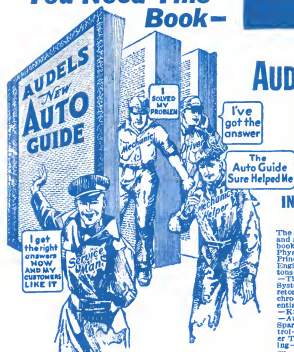
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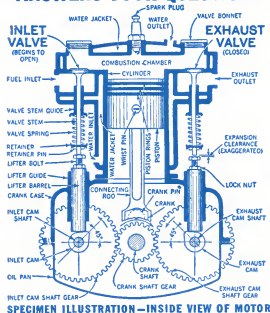
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